

THE OUTCASTE



F. E. PENNY



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THE OUTCASTE

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HISTORY OF FORT ST. GEORGE, MADRAS
ON THE COROMANDEL COAST

THE NAUTCH GIRL

THE FOREST OFFICER

A MIXED MARRIAGE

THE SANYASI

DILYS

CASTE AND CREED

THE TEA-PLANTER

THE INEVITABLE LAW

DARK CORNERS

THE UNLUCKY MARK

SACRIFICE

THE RAJAH

THE MALABAR MAGICIAN

THE OUTCASTE

BY

F. E. PENNY

AUTHOR OF

"THE SANYASI," "THE RAJAH," "THE MALABAR
MAGICIAN," ETC.

SPECIAL EDITION

For sale only in India and the British Colonies

LONDON

CHATTO & WINDUS

1912

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DEDICATED
TO THE
STUDENTS OF HINDU THEOLOGY AND ETHICS
WHOSE WRITINGS
HAVE ASSISTED ME TO TELL
THIS STORY

1923569

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The scene is laid in the Native State of Chirakul.

CHIRAPORE	. . .	Chief Town of Chirakul,
ANANDA	. . .	A Convert to Christianity,
BOPAUL	. . .	Friend of Ananda, and of the same Caste,
COOMARA	. . .	Married to Bopaul's Sister,
DR. WENASTON	. .	Principal of the Maharajah's College at Chirapore.
EOLA WENASTON	. .	His Sister.
PROFESSOR TWYFORD		
MRS. HULVER	. .	Housekeeper to Dr. Wenaston.
DORAMA	. . .	Ananda's Wife.
PANTULU	. . .	His Father.
GUNGA	. . .	His Mother.
SOOBA	. . .	His Uncle.
MAYITA	. . .	Coomara's Widow.



THE OUTCASTE

CHAPTER I

THE aviation ground was thronged with spectators. Eyes were turned skywards and men held their breath. Women uttered ejaculations, drawn unconsciously from them in their intense excitement. The wind blew gustily with an upward sweep that sent dead leaves and fragments of paper into the air. A furious blast heralding the coming storm seized one of the aviators as he was in the act of turning. It seemed to shake him with a living enmity. Under the violent motion the tips of the delicate wings of his machine snapped. He recognised the seriousness of the accident; and the breathless multitude watched his efforts to avoid impending catastrophe. As well might the dying bird, winged by the October sportsman, try to sustain its arrested flight. The machine ceased its horizontal movement, folded its broken planes about its struggling guide, and dropped almost vertically to the ground.

Some, fascinated by the horror of it all, stared at the falling wreck. Others withdrew their gaze, but could

not shut their ears to the thud and crash in which the earthly life of a human being came to an abrupt end.

The hush was followed by a murmur as emotion found expression in speech and exclamation. Many of the women shed tears ; some screamed ; a few fainted. Ten minutes later there was a general stir as the sight-seers, sick at heart, began to depart.

Eola Wenaston beckoned to her brother, who stood at a little distance talking to a couple of men. He approached the motor car into which she had just stepped. Before she could speak he hastened to reassure her, anticipating the question that was on the lips of all.

"It's all right ; the man is not dead. Of course he has had a shock, falling from such a height, and the machine is smashed to atoms. You need not be nervous——"

"I'm not nervous. It was a horrid sight, but I'm not troubled with nerves. The man must be dead after such a fall."

"Well, no one can say how——"

She interrupted him with a touch of impatience born of anxiety.

"Would you mind going home by train ? Mrs. Greenford is thoroughly unhinged. She is in that tent over there crying her heart out, and she ought to be taken away at once."

"She doesn't know him, does she ?"

"Yes, slightly. It appears that he dined with her and her husband last night."

"What do you wish to do?"

"Drive her home at once; but it leaves you to go by rail. You won't mind giving her your seat in the motor?"

She did not doubt for a moment that he would object. The car was a new purchase made by Wenaston on his arrival in England on furlough. He intended to take it back to India on his return to his work.

"Not a bit," he replied readily.

"I can't ask Miss Stuart to give up her place in the car."

"Of course not; I'll join Ananda and his friends. They are travelling up by the special leaving in about an hour's time."

"You need not journey in their company. Now-a-days, when our blood is curdled by assassinations——"

He interrupted her.

"They are all right—three of the nicest fellows I know."

She made a little grimace, not noticing that a Hindu, faultlessly frock-coated and top-hatted, had approached on the other side of the motor, and was waiting for an opportunity to speak, waiting with the courtesy of good breeding that happily is not the monopoly of the European.

"Still, one cannot forget——" she mentioned the name of a well-known public man who had been done to death by an Oriental fanatic.

The blood rushed to the temples of the Hindu. He raised his hat as he said quietly—

“You must not suppose that we are all assassins, Miss Wenaston, any more than I may suppose you English to be all murderers like——” and he in his turn named a notorious criminal who had recently been convicted of a murder perpetrated under circumstances of peculiar cruelty.

“Of course not ! I beg your pardon, Mr. Ananda. I ought not to have said it.”

In her contrition she turned and held out her hand. She felt the nervous close grip, momentary as it was, and the friendliness of the Englishwoman warmed towards the exile.

“My brother proposes to travel home with you by rail and give his seat in the motor to Mrs. Greenford, who is upset by the accident. Have you heard how the aviator is ? ”

“I am afraid from all accounts he is in a bad way. The committee has decided to stop the competitions for to-day. Visitors ought to have no objection.”

“It is sad to have an ending like this ! ” She turned to Wenaston. “Please go and find Mrs. Greenford ; Miss Stuart is with her. Bring them both here. Tell them I am in a hurry to start. I should like to get Mrs. Greenford away before she hears worse news. Oh ! I wish he hadn’t attempted that last flight ! It was quite unnecessary, and not on the programme—a mere show to please the people.”

Ananda stood by the motor whilst Wenaston went to do his sister's bidding.

"You take these things too seriously, Miss Wenaston. If you were a fatalist you would believe that it was pre-ordained by the gods ; and you would be resigned. It is of no use to fight against fate. He had to meet it whether he flew upon an aeroplane or whether he remained in his own house. We are taught that we cannot escape the fulfilment of our destiny."

She looked at him, her attention suddenly rivetted.

"You are taught, you say ; but do you believe your teacher in these days of greater enlightenment ? "

A reply was not immediately forthcoming. Perhaps he would have left the question unanswered if she had not uttered an interrogatory, "Well ? " in a tone that held something more than mere curiosity.

"I am trying to retain my belief in all that my guru instilled into my mind before I left India."

"You find it hard to keep the old faith unshaken ? "

"Not exactly. The difficulty is to graft the new teaching on the old. We of the advanced school cannot stand still ; we must progress."

"And then comes the difficulty of putting new wine into old bottles."

She glanced in the direction of the tent, and he knew that he had lost half her attention. Wenaston was visible in the distance with Mrs. Greenford and Miss Stuart. The sympathy that was so marked a characteristic in Eola had tempted the Hindu to say more than

was his wont. It was deflected from himself and turned towards the unnerved woman, whom she was charitably befriending.

Mrs. Greenford was allowed no time to plunge into fresh tears and regrets. She was prevailed upon to enter the car without delay. Wenaston gave his orders to the chauffeur and the motor glided from the field.

“It is too early in the day to make gala shows of this aviation business. An accident such as has just happened upsets the women with their highly strung nerves. Even men feel it to be a bit of a shock,” remarked Wenaston, as he glanced round at the white faces of the spectators.

“Anyway, women should not be present where there is a likelihood of accidents,” replied Ananda. “It seems to me that you Englishmen go to the opposite extreme from us. We shut up women and overdo the purdah business. You give them too much liberty.”

“My dear fellow! They take it without asking our permission!”

They were slowly moving towards the exit. There was no need of haste as their train was not due to start for another half-hour, and the station was but ten minutes' walk. Before Ananda could reply they were joined by two more Hindus. In appearance these men were like Ananda, although there was no blood relationship between them. Their complexions were of the wheaten tint that frequently goes with high caste and

good birth. They were equally well dressed in the latest English fashion, without extravagance or display. To Wenaston they were well known, and he greeted them as old acquaintances.

"The show is at an end, Dr. Wenaston. It is reported that the poor fellow is dead. It only remains for us to go back to town," said one who was called Bopaul by his friends.

"I am sorry it has ended fatally. I suppose every new scientific venture must have its victims. The claims of aviation will be every whit as heavy as were the claims of steam and electricity," responded Wenaston.

"The death dues of the gods!" murmured the other, known as Coomara.

Bopaul laughed lightly but Ananda turned a pair of serious eyes upon Wenaston.

"You don't believe that the higher power ruling our destinies requires to be propitiated by a holocaust of victims, do you?" he asked.

"Certainly not. Accidents occur through the imperfection of machines; and with each accident it is only natural that an important step is made towards a more perfect knowledge."

"Exactly so," rejoined Coomara, eagerly. "In return for a life, the Fountain of all knowledge in his justice and rectitude gives knowledge."

"Life is not demanded in exchange or in payment for knowledge," objected Wenaston. "Knowledge might be acquired without loss of life if men were more careful

and less rash. The death of the experimenter is due to his own ignorance, to his rashness, or to the imperfection of the machine in its inception."

"You do not believe that it is the direct act of God?"

Wenaston did not reply. They were threading their way through the crowd that had gathered near the exit of the field, and conversation was not easy. On all sides they heard comments upon the accident. Regrets were expressed freely that the new cult had lost one of its cleverest pioneers. His death—by this time it was known that the fallen aviator had breathed his last even as they carried him from the field—his death was sad from every point of view. He was a good, a thoroughly good fellow; clever beyond most men. Married? no; but there was a girl—he was living at home with his people, and he was going to be married shortly. Money? Oh yes, plenty, or he could not have experimented as he did. And the cause of the accident? Ignorance of air currents and the power of the wind. His wings were broken, and there was no hope from the very first of salvation. Although he struggled with the machine he must have been aware that he had no chance of escape. The next thing to invent must be some life-saving apparatus.

Among their acquaintances the three Hindus were spoken of as A, B, and C; or as Ananda, Bopaul, and Coomara. In addition to these names they possessed others unfamiliar to the English ear and difficult of pronunciation. The men were of good birth and high

caste ; they belonged to a native State south of Poona, called Chirakul, the chief town being Chirapore. Under pressure of modern times the parents—people of substance and wealth—had sent their sons to Poona and Bombay to be educated. Later on, arrangements were made for a visit to England. It was due to the friendly offices of Wenaston that they entered the house of Dr. Twyford, professor of oriental languages. Their future was assured without the necessity of taking up any of the professions. It was the intention of their parents to make homes for them under the ancestral roof, where they would lead the life of the leisured Hindu landowner. If any occupation were adopted it would be of a political nature—some appointment of importance and trust under the Maharajah's Government.

Although the three men were alike in dress, complexion and features, and belonged to the same caste, they were very dissimilar in character and temperament.

Ananda was gentle and speculative. His nerves were finely strung, and he shrank like a woman from physical pain and discomfort, and from anything that was of a rough and discordant nature. The timidity of the Hindu peeped out on various occasions, a timidity that was not so much cowardice as an inbred loathing of coarseness and brutality. The strong religious instinct, which seems to bring the Asiatic close to his strangely conceived deities in worship and propitiation, underlaid all his actions.

In early youth he had been married to the sister of his friend Coomara. The marriage had been consummated, and there was a child, a son four years of age; and during his absence mother and son found a happy home with his parents.

Bopaul was a fair specimen of the product of modern education. Untainted with disloyalty towards the ruling power, he was never likely to become a disciple of disaffection, and join with ambitious men of lower caste. Aristocratic to his finger-tips, he believed in his Prince, and hoped to find a place on his council at some time in the future.

By nature he was sunny and buoyant, taking life as he found it. Eager to listen to the latest theories and ready to argue, he nevertheless proved elusive and disappointing to the serious propagandist. Tolerant, without being weak, courteous and even-tempered, he seemed to be flexible; but when it came to uprooting inherited beliefs, he proved immovable. The casual observer accused him of flippancy and infidelity. His host and guardian, Professor Twyford, knew better.

"Bopaul is an extraordinary fellow," he used to say. "I introduce him to all the latest theories, to all the facts most recently revealed by science; he receives them with intelligence and avidity, not to exchange new lamps for old, but to graft them on to the old Hindu stock. I can understand when I look at Bopaul the wonderful receptivity of the Hindu nature. It has

preserved the caste system for the last three thousand years, a unique survival that has no equal in the history of the world. The Hindus absorb and orientalise theories that ought to deal their social and religious system a death blow. I can see Bopaul fitting the latest and most revolutionary ideas into niches in his mind without permitting any conflict with the tenets of his ancient faith. He is a very interesting character."

Coomara was unlike either of his companions. He held to the letter of his faith ; listened courteously but without interest to modern teaching ; wherever it clashed with the teaching of the Vedas, he rejected it as being incompatible, and therefore useless to himself. He refused to discuss the subject of religious differences. It was waste of time if nothing else. When he first fell under the influence of the professor he showed a disinclination to speak on religion at all. Gradually he gained confidence as he discovered that Twyford had no design of converting him to the Christian faith, and became more communicative. Somewhat to his astonishment he learned that the Englishman possessed a greater and more intimate knowledge of the sacred books of his nation than himself. As his confidence strengthened, he became more communicative and less afraid of listening to other doctrines.

Coomara had been married to Bopaul's sister when he was ten years old ; hence the link that bound the three men together. The period of exile appointed by their respective parents was within a few months of its

termination, and they were looking forward to their return to Chirakul, when the ceremonies necessary to restore their caste would be performed and Coomara's wedding be completed; for his marriage had been practically only a betrothal from the European point of view. The honeymoon had yet to be spent.

CHAPTER II

THE run to London by the express was to occupy an hour. As Wenaston and his companions entered the station the train stood ready by the platform. There was a rush for the carriages, and before they could make their way to a first-class smoker, every seat was occupied. A number of people were in the same case as themselves, being unable to find places. He stopped an official and asked when the next train would start.

“A duplicate will be put on as soon as this has been sent off. There will be plenty of room in that, sir.”

A quarter of an hour later they were comfortably seated in a compartment which they had to themselves. The train ran smoothly and conversation was possible. The Englishman alone smoked. To the high-caste Hindu the replacing of the cigar in the mouth after it has touched the tongue and lips is an offence against caste. The men had no objection, however, to the smoke made by another.

“I suppose there was no doubt about the man being dead?” said Ananda, as they again discussed the event of the day.

“None whatever,” replied Bopaul. “I heard it announced by a member of the committee, who gave it

out as a reason for stopping all further aviation. The competitions were over, and the programme completed. The man was only marking time, so to speak, just to keep the people amused."

"He offered to do it, I heard," remarked Ananda.

"With the wind increasing he ought not to have been allowed to take such a risk," said Wenaston. "It is waste of life to hurl a man into eternity for such a trivial reason."

"Hurl a man into eternity," repeated Ananda slowly, his dreamy eyes fixed upon the speaker.

"Oh, well; that's just a way of talking. I meant the life after death," replied Wenaston, slightly taken aback.

"The life? You don't mean re-incarnation; transmigration is not one of your doctrines of belief. You mean life elsewhere?"

"Yes, in the future—in another world."

"Do you really believe that you will have a personality—that you can retain the *ego* that is in you now—when you enter any other world but this?"

"I hope so. We are taught by our religion that something of the sort is to take place. What is your belief?" asked Wenaston, turning the conversation on to Hinduism. Before Ananda could reply, Coomara, assertive in the stronghold of his steadfast faith, spoke.

"We believe that after a long succession of rebirths on this earth we shall be absorbed in the Deity."

Wenaston did not reply, and Coomara explained thinking that the Englishman had not understood

“—the great impersonal Brahma, the origin of all things, the Spirit that your Bible says brooded on the face of the waters when the world was without form.”

“You can’t expect any positive happiness in such a state,” objected Wenaston.

“Why not ?”

“How can you hope for positive happiness if you are impersonal yourself and forming part of an impersonal Deity ?”

“There is no reason why we should not enjoy a state or condition of happiness if the Deity so willed it.”

Wenaston avoided the exceedingly difficult question of impersonality and exercise of the Divine will ; and turned the conversation to a subject that was directly and humanly personal.

“Then if you were killed suddenly like that aviator, you would die in the comfortable assurance that you would join your God and become part of Him.”

Somewhat to his surprise there was no reply. He glanced round at his companions under the impression that they had tired of the topic, and were no longer interested. The expression of their faces did not confirm this idea. Coomara’s eyes were averted, but Ananda’s were fixed upon the speaker ; and in their depths lurked a shadow of fear that Wenaston could not fathom. He turned to the half-closed window. The wind had increased and the threatened storm of rain had

begun. It was coming down in driving sheets that beat against the glass and obliterated the landscape.

"We are going to have a stormy night ; this is not a shower," he remarked, as he drew up the window and closed it completely.

It was Bopaul who broke the silence. The seriousness of the subject had no effect on him. On the contrary, Wenaston thought he detected an undercurrent of amusement in his tone.

"Our future life depends on the circumstances surrounding death. The attainment of everlasting happiness would by no means fall to our lot, I am afraid. It is more likely that we individually would be overtaken by punishment."

"You have no hell to fear," replied Wenaston.

"We need not fear the hell described by the teachers of your religion ; but we have an equivalent. It lies in our transmigration doctrine. Rebirth on earth as some inferior creature is our hell ; existence as a horse, a dhoby-donkey, a rat, a loathsome pariah, a dog or a reptile according to the heinousness of our sins."

Bopaul smiled grimly as he caught the expression on the faces of Coomara and Ananda. The latter could not conceal his horror at the contemplation of an existence in a lower birth, where pain and servitude, he believed, would crush out every joy of life. His sensitive nature revolted against the thought of the indignities and sufferings such a birth must involve. Coomara's fatalism saved him in some degree from the dread that

overwhelmed Ananda. If he were destined to a succession of inferior births it would be impossible to avoid them. The inevitable must be faced. As well might a man try to draw the sun down from its place in the heavens and stop its course as to endeavour to upset the law of destiny.

"It certainly sounds appalling," commented Wenaston.

"Such a fate is as much dreaded by the orthodox Hindu as the fate believed by Christians to be the portion of malefactors after death," said Bopaul, without hesitation.

"Then you must take care never to offend your Deity," remarked Wenaston.

"Our code of offence is different from yours. We have no decalogue. I may commit murder, for instance, without offence, if I kill a pariah or an out-caste ; but if the victim of my enmity happened to be a Brahman, the aspect of the deed would be utterly changed. The sin would be enormous. Nothing short of a cycle of inferior births could reinstate me and restore me to the position I occupy at the present time."

"None of you are likely to kill a Brahman, I imagine," said Wenaston lightly, and with the design of dissipating a little of the solemnity that seemed to have settled upon Coomara and Ananda.

His well-meant efforts were unavailing. It was evident that so serious a subject was not to be dismissed in a moment.

“There are other ways of transgressing, which, if persisted in, bring down upon us the curse of inferior rebirth,” said Bopaul. “Carelessness and neglect in the performance of our religious duties. Manu, the law-giver, himself defines sin in clear, unmistakeable terms. We can transgress by neglecting to read the Vedas; by falling away from prescribed customs; by remissness in the performance of holy rites. In addition, offences may come through using a wrong diet and omitting ceremonial ablutions and prayers. In short, our sins chiefly consist of the breaking of our caste rules by omission or commission.”

“Your code is simple enough if you have it all laid down by your law-giver. All you have to do is to take care not to break your rules,” observed Wenaston, ignoring a fact that he was well aware of.

The conversation had gone beyond the limits of light inconsequent talk; and he was watching for an opportunity to express his views courteously and without giving offence on caste and the absurdity of clinging to a belief in rigid ceremonial. By profession he was an educationalist. Without any intention of proselytising it came naturally to him to combat beliefs that he considered to be obsolete and obstructive to progress of thought. He had started the conversation simply to pass the time as they travelled. He continued it that he might tilt without offence at that which he took to be the greatest obstacle to the advancement of education among the Hindus. His words were not without effect.

It was Bopaul who ventured to speak out and declare what was in the mind of all three.

“In our case we have broken the rules of caste, and broken them badly. The journey to England alone involves a rupture of a serious nature.”

Ananda wore an expression of anxiety that he did not attempt to hide. It was true. From the Hindu point of view he was living in sin. He had not only offended against the order of his caste in crossing the sea ; but every day that was passed in the foreign country was a continuance of sin. The sense of sin lay heavy on his conscience and at times weighed him down to the verge of nervous melancholy. Under its influence he had, soon after his arrival in England, written an urgent letter to his father praying that he might be permitted to return and perform those purificatory rites which would remove the burden of offence.

There was no possibility of escape as long as he remained in a foreign land. The daily ablutions were but half performed ; the daily worship of the household gods was 'omitted altogether for want of the necessary accessories—the metal image, the rice, camphor, sugar and ghee. In the matter of diet there was dire offence in the preparation of his food ; also in the method of partaking it. Contamination was in the very shadow of the crowd that jostled him in his going and coming. His appeal to his father met with no response.

Resigning himself to his fate he did his best to become

reconciled to his environment. Occasionally he regarded the English men and women who surrounded him with something like envy. They did not appear to be overshadowed by any gloomy apprehensions of the future. Did they cover their fears and forebodings with a contentment that was assumed? A few questions put to the Professor disabused his mind of that suspicion. They were as happy as they appeared to be, he was told. Their creed reassured them and banished fear. Christ, their great teacher, had given them definite promises in the Gospels that left them in no uncertainty. The way was easy for any one who chose to follow it, and no man could complain that he was driven against his will into a state of sin and offence equivalent to that which troubled the exiled Hindu. Ananda, as he listened to the Professor, went so far as to envy the Christians their faith. He had no intention of becoming a Christian, but there was undoubtedly relief for them in their immunity from the horrible dread of re-entering this world as a disgusting insect or a miserable beast of burden. With eyes fixed eagerly upon Wenaston he listened for his comment on the situation.

“You are the victims of circumstances over which you have no control. Your parents sent you to England without consulting your wishes. Do you really believe that their action has caused you to sin and deprived you of your hope of heaven?”

“Not our hope of the future,” corrected Bopaul. “When the offence is wiped out by propitiatory

ceremonies we shall be restored to the favour of the gods."

"What if you die before your return to India?"

"Ah! then we die in sin, and the dreaded rebirth cannot be avoided; but we hope to escape such a catastrophe and to return safely to our country to perform the necessary expiatory ceremonies."

"It is a monstrous belief!" cried Wenaston, moved in spite of himself as he glanced at Ananda overshadowed by fear, and at Coomara on whose countenance was written the hopeless resignation of the fatalist. "It is incredible that a beneficent Deity can order a weary round of innumerable re-births in a lower instead of a higher existence, and condemn men to undergo this penance for deeds in which there is no evil intention; deeds for which they themselves are not responsible. Even if you are fortunate enough at the end of unthinkable cycles of earthly existence to reach the limit, you can hope for nothing better than absorption in an impersonal Spirit. To my mind such a fate is little short of annihilation."

He looked at Coomara, who, with eyes averted and lips firmly closed, listened to these heretical suggestions unmoved. As Wenaston spoke, the Hindu moved his seat, slipping into the opposite corner near the other window. It was his method of showing that he did not wish to take any further part in the conversation. Bopaul was eager to continue it, and Ananda could not

resist the fascination that heresy had for his inquiring nature. None of them ventured to comment on the opinions just enunciated; and Wenaston continued.

“The thought of the extinction of the *ego* in man is nothing less than appalling. I know that there are certain men among our Western students who have entertained the idea; they honestly try to persuade themselves that they believe in the cessation of every kind of life after death; but I cannot credit them with faith in such a theory. To begin with, extinction is not possible to the human understanding. The scientist pronounces extinction to be unknown with matter. There is mutation, disintegration, but never extinction. We have every reason to believe that the spiritual law follows on the same lines as the law of material life, although the theory is not supported by any known law. There is undoubtedly implanted in every soul the belief in a hereafter. Your faith leads you to expect rebirth in this world. Mine is immeasurably superior. It transcends all earthly——”

His words were suddenly cut short. The carriage rocked on its wheels and lurched on one side, throwing its occupants forward with great violence. A moment later a steel monster crashed through the panelling, rending the cushions and splintering the wood.

On it came with horrible celerity, catching Coomara in the corner where he had just settled himself. Before

he could struggle out of its reach, it pinned him down with its full weight.

A cry that was stifled into a groan escaped his lips as the horrible buffer crushed the life out of his fragile body; Coomara the orthodox went to meet his fate, whatever it might be; the relentless cycle of inferior rebirths or the peace that passeth all understanding promised by a loving and merciful God.

CHAPTER III

COOMARA, the orthodox, the punctilious observer of caste rule and ceremony, was dead. He had died in sin before the cleansing rites could be performed which alone could restore the purity of his birth and reinstate him in his caste.

Bopaul, when he had recovered from the stunned condition into which the accident threw him, fell back upon the deadening doctrine of fatalism. It was destiny, and there was no escape. All-powerful fate had ordained it ; first, that they should miss the earlier train which reached its journey's end in safety ; secondly, that Coomara should make a move to the opposite side of the carriage and seat himself on the very spot to which the buffer penetrated. The rest of the occupants escaped with bruises and a few cuts from broken glass. What else could have brought about the occurrence but the direct will of the gods ?

To Ananda the affair was a great shock. His nervous system was completely upset. The memory of the scene recurred again and again during the day and the night, depriving him of sleep and rest. It was not only the loss of his friend and companion in exile that grieved him, but the appalling thought that the dead man had

been thrust into a cycle of rebirths and existences wherein pain, sordidness and unspeakable degradation would be his lot ; where beauty, joy and comfort would find no part. At that very moment the troubled spirit might be entering upon its new life with groans and sighs in squalid environment. He recalled Coomara's careful observance of everything that related to his religion ; his dislike of all that was not strictly orthodox ; his unwillingness even to listen to heretical teaching. No man could be more innocent of intention in transgressing caste rule than Coomara. With his sensitive temperament, his pride of birth and caste, none could feel his punishment in a greater degree. Day and night Ananda brooded and sorrowed, uncomforted by the oft-repeated assurance of Bopaul that it was the inevitable decree of fate ; and that what was written on a man's forehead by the gods could not be averted.

The Professor observed his distress and was troubled. It affected the health of his guest, causing his appetite to fail. Sleep came fitfully ; and rest during the day seemed well-nigh impossible, as Ananda paced the room or wandered up and down the garden without purpose. Everything in the shape of study ended. The books were opened and the Professor began to lecture ; but he soon discovered that he failed to interest Bopaul, and that Ananda's thoughts had wandered far from the subject in hand. Under the impression that the mind might be relieved by speech, he encouraged both to talk of the trouble that had overtaken them. He listened seriously

and with patience as Ananda propounded the doctrine of transmigration. At the conclusion the Professor combatted it, repeating all the arguments against the theory.

“It is monstrous to ascribe such cruelty to the Deity,” he said. “You admit that God is all-powerful. Why cannot you give Him credit for beneficence? You call Him the All-Father. If He is a father, at least allow Him the attributes of a father.”

“How can He break His own rules?” cried Bopaul. “It is laid down by Divine authority in the Vedas that certain consequences must follow certain deeds. It is a common law of life all over the world. You hang your murderer, regardless of his repentance. Can you cleanse the hand of the murderer from the blood in which he has dipped it? You yourself admit that as the tree falls so must it lie; the tree falls not by its will nor by its merit, but by fate.”

“Christ came into the world to give us a new law,” said the Professor. “It is true that by the old Mosaic teaching we punish the murderer. If he dies repentant, we have the promise of Christ made on the Cross that his sins will assuredly be forgiven. To the crucified thief He said, ‘This day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.’ He gave the promise almost with his last breath, and the man to whom it was made had sinned wilfully and with design. Is it likely that they who have transgressed unintentionally will have to suffer with those whose hearts are hardened?”

“The thief on the Cross was a Christian already,

probably, and a follower of your Prophet," said Bopaul.

"There is nothing to show that he had followed Christ, or been influenced by His teaching. All that he knew was that his strange companion was branded with no crime. If Christ could promise forgiveness—which meant immunity from punishment—to a wilful criminal who was neither baptized nor a follower, is it not believable that He could forgive and secure immunity from punishment to one like Coomara, whose life was humanly blameless? Our God is all-powerful, all-embracing, just and loving. Through His Son He shows mercy to all, regardless of race and religion."

"Is He—is He—stronger than Brahma?" asked Ananda, in a low voice.

"He is stronger and mightier than all the gods in the Universe," declared the Professor, in ringing tones that almost carried conviction. Even Bopaul, the trifler, was impressed. He rose from his seat and strolled to the window.

"Our guru would warn us that it was sinful to listen to the claims of any other God but our own."

As he spoke he turned and looked at Ananda with warning in his eye.

"He who refuses to listen is a coward," said Twyford. "In these days of tolerance and freedom of thought, the student asks for liberty to probe and sound every doctrine that is presented. He demands a wide field that he may view from all sides, weigh and measure the

new with the old. Above all, he requires to be told all that there is to be learned ; for, without hearing the arguments for and against, no man is able to form a just opinion."

"In that case the guru ought to be here to represent and defend his side of the argument," said Bopaul.

"You have already learned all that he could teach you. Your people sent you to England that you might hear more ; that you might be made acquainted with every question that is agitating the western world of science, of politics and of religion."

"Ah, well !" replied Bopaul, in a lighter and more careless tone. "We are acquiring knowledge under you, sir ; we can sift and compare without apostacy, I hope. Come for a walk, Ananda. The fresh air will clear away the cobwebs from our brains and make us more profitable pupils."

The Professor's grey eyes, full of sympathy and friendliness, rested on Ananda in silence. He did not say, "Go ; the walk will do you good." Nor did he reach out his hand for pen or book, a sign that he was ready to return to his own studies. He waited, leaning back in the revolving chair in front of his writing-table.

"No, thanks ; I would rather stay in-doors. The noise and traffic of the streets——"

"You will never conquer your nerves by keeping away from the outside world. It will have to be faced sooner or later ; the sooner the better," said Bopaul, as his hand touched the door.

Ananda turned from the speaker to the silent Professor, and gathered strength from his steady gaze.

“Don’t wait, Bopaul; I am not going out this morning.”

With a lifting of the shoulders the other left the room, shifting responsibility on to the Englishman. Silence was maintained for some seconds after his departure. Ananda broke it.

“If only I could believe that this endless cycle of rebirths need not be, I should be happier,” he said.

The pathetic appeal for some ray of hope went straight to Twyford’s heart. Pity and an intense desire to help in spiritual trouble roused the man, and he poured forth the doctrines of comfort that console the dying Christian. It was not done with the intention of converting, but in the merciful desire of bringing some small consolation to the despairing man to whom the fear of the future made life in the present intolerable. The fate that had overtaken Coomara might at any moment, whether at home or abroad, be Ananda’s.

For more than an hour they talked, and the gloom on Ananda’s face lightened.

“It is most comforting as you put it, but—it is not my creed,” he said. There was a pause, and he added, “I cannot change my faith.”

“I do not ask you to change it. Is it not possible, however, in these days of advanced thought that you may be able to modify some of the fossilised tenets of

your religion? The spirit of reform is abroad, and a Hindu may become a member of the Brahmo-Somaj or the Ayra-Somaj without losing caste, without cutting himself adrift from his community, his family. There is no hurry. The fathers may rest content to think of these things. Their sons will act."

There was a sound of a footstep outside. The door opened, and Bopaul appeared.

"Lunch is ready, sir. I am sure you must be tired talking so long. You should have driven that foolish Ananda out into the air and sunshine, instead of letting him waste your time."

"I don't think that the time has been wasted," replied the Professor, kindly.

Bopaul shot a swift glance at Ananda, but learned nothing except the fact that the latter was ill at ease under his scrutiny. The lunch bell rang, and Ananda hurried to his room. As he disappeared Bopaul said in a tone that was unusually earnest for him.

"Sir, remember your promise to his parents. Forgive me for reminding you of it. I know his people, and what a terrible thing it will be for them if his faith is shaken. He is their only son."

"Believe me, I have not broken faith with them. I have been preaching reform rather than conversion, although I admit that it would please me better if it had been the other way about. Ananda must have led a very sheltered life in his youth, and this I fancy is his first great trouble. He needs help, and it is difficult to

give it under the peculiar circumstances in which I find myself.”

* * * * *

The Professor was not far wrong when he said that Ananda's childhood had been sheltered.

Born of wealthy parents and the only son, surrounded with every luxury that love could devise, he had been guarded from trouble of all kind. He, on his part, had been amenable to his parents' wishes, obedient and gentle, always ready to be guided. Content to be ruled, his will power lay dormant, and there seemed little likelihood of it being roused into activity; for the desires of those whose authority he recognised never clashed with his own. The life of his father, Pantulu Iyer, had been smooth, as is the case with many men of high caste families. The life of the son promised to be the same.

At the age of twelve he was married to Coomara's sister, three years his junior. When he was seventeen the marriage was consummated, and the girl took up her residence with his parents. It was a happy home, free from strife, and the daughter-in-law found no difficulty in fitting herself into her place. She shared the love that the parents in the fullness of their affection showered upon their son.

When Ananda was nineteen and Dorama, his wife, sixteen, she presented him with a son. If anything could have been added to the cup of joy that was already full, it was this.

“Now we are assured of the completion of our happiness and the fulfilment of our desire,” said his father. “we may allow ourselves to consider your future. One day we hope to see you take a prominent part in the government of the country. Possibly you may rise to occupy a place on the Maharajah’s council. These honours cannot be attained without a journey to England.”

“Is it necessary, my father?” asked Ananda, watching his young wife as she sat on the fine grass matting with the baby on her lap. He would have been more than content to continue in the pleasant backwater of domestic life without seeking new scenes.

“It is necessary in these days of progress. His Highness himself takes occasional voyages across the ocean to see the western world with his own eyes.”

“His caste is not our caste,” objected Ananda, with the unconscious superiority of a man of better birth.

“Still, his example is to be imitated.”

“Not without loss of caste.”

“Caste can be restored on your return. The penances and penalties are lighter than they used to be.”

“But the breaking of caste is none the less serious for the lightening of the penalties.”

“That may be,” assented Pantulu. “All the same, it is imperative in these days that men should see something of the world outside their own State; and there is no doubt that those who have travelled in Europe, and lived for a time in England, are preferred in the

council to those who have had no experience. Having thought the matter well over, my son, your mother and I have decided on this step. You will sail from Bombay in April next ; and it is proposed by their families to send Coomara and Bopaul with you."

Ananda's father consulted with Wenaston, who had recently been appointed as Principal of the large college at Chirapore, as to the best place of residence in London ; with the result that the three Hindus found themselves committed to the care of Professor Twyford.

Bopaul had no qualms over his broken caste. He accepted the decree of exile with pleasure, and determined to make the most of his opportunities. He intended to amuse himself as well as read with the Professor ; and he carried out his programme, the only shadow to cross his path later being the death of Coomara.

Shortly before they left for England, the guru paid them a visit. The Vedas were quoted and the laws of Manu repeated with many warnings against falling away from the faith.

"You are going to a foreign land, the home of revolutionary teaching. Be careful how you listen, and let no one undermine the instructions that I with divine authority have given you. Attempts will be made ; you must resist them. Here in this State of Chirakul we still enjoy the great boon of an hereditary ruler. Under his government we have successfully repelled the innovations that have been introduced into British India.

If fate should decree that any of you enter the service of our Maharajah, it will rest with you to help to preserve our ancient faith."

Coomara looked up at the tall figure that stood before him, and his glance fell beneath the fiery eyes. He dropped at the feet of the teacher and pressed his forehead to the ground with words of worship and adoration such as might have been addressed to the Deity. In his eyes the guru was God Himself, neither His messenger nor prophet; and as such he bowed himself in deep humility and worshipped. As he lay there a voice like the voice of a god reached him.

"My son, I do not forbid your ears to listen nor your eyes to see. What you hear and see will be of use in the work you will have to do on your return. A knowledge of the enemy is necessary to success."

"What work, oh swami? May thy servant know?"

"The preservation of our great religion, the emancipation of our country, the elevation of our nation; the casting out of a race of demons who would have us believe that they are spirits of light. May they be accursed with their Christ!"

He broke into imprecations against the supreme power that claimed sovereignty over the Maharajah of Chirakul and against the Founder of the Christian faith.

"Swami, is it your decree that I should take this voyage across the black water—that I should break my caste?"

"Only by going to England can you ever hope to

rise to a position wherein you may help the cause that we have at heart."

"And if I die in that foreign land, swami?"

"You will be born again to suffering and degradation," said the inexorable voice.

"Swami, swami! Let me stay in my father's house."

"It cannot be. It is the will of the gods!" replied the guru. "My son," he added, in softer accents, "be not afraid. You will return in safety to help the cause we have at heart and be blessed by the holy Brahmans."

Ananda and Bopaul heard the words and remembered them afterwards. "You will be born again to toil and suffering and degradation."

And they believed them; for had they not been spoken by the guru, in whom dwelt the divine afflatus?

* * * * *

Dr. Wenaston shortened his stay in town after the accident, and cancelled his social engagements. The death of Coomara affected him, though in a lesser degree. He developed an aversion to public gatherings and to the assemblage of a crowd in street or train or on the field of sport. A vague feeling of apprehension destroyed his pleasure, and he recognised with dismay that he, too, was suffering from nerves.

There was only one remedy, and that was to seek comparative solitude for a while until the nervous system should recover its equilibrium.

His sister suggested a leisurely motor trip into the depths of the country. They could choose their road and regulate their pace to please themselves.

They wandered through the south and west of England, fortunate in their weather and choice of route. When it suited them they remained at a quiet little seaside place for a week or two ; or in a still more sleepy country town, with the happy result that Wenaston entirely recovered his health mentally and bodily.

The summer passed and he sent his sister home to make her preparation for the voyage to India, while he went to his club for the same object. He had not seen the Professor since he led Ananda and Bopaul back to his house in dazed and prostrate condition on that memorable afternoon, and had told the story of the accident.

On his arrival in town he wrote to Mrs. Twyford, saying that he would come to lunch on the following Sunday.

It was one of those bright autumn days, when the sun touched every object with a golden light. Even the city of smoke and fog was rendered beautiful in its dress of grey and gold. The streets, thronged on week-day with traffic, were empty except during the half-hour before service. Church-bells rang out their call in all directions, summoning their eclectic congregations to the morning services. The sound of the great cathedral chimes dominated them all.

Wenaston stood for a minute or two on the steps of

St. Paul's listening, that he might retain the echo in his ears and carry it away into exile. Temple-bells might clang around him, and the ding-ding-ding of the Christian Church bell call him on Sunday ; but nowhere throughout the East would a melody like that sent forth from the dome of St. Paul's ever ring in his ear.

He entered the cathedral and moved swiftly up the centre aisle. The space under the dome was filling fast. He turned to the right and found a seat near the pulpit.

The chimes ceased, and the big bell monotoned the final invitation to the increasing crowd. Before it stopped the organ pealed forth the first chords of the voluntary.

If the truth is to be recorded, Wenaston had not gone to church with any conscious desire to humble himself in prayer, nor to lift his soul to God in praise. The melody of the choir succeeded the song of the bells. He listened passively, revelling in the perfect harmony and abandoning himself to the soothing, almost sensuous feeling of peace and contentment brought by the music and environment. He knelt and stood, following mechanically the example of his neighbours ; and when the organ ceased and the preacher entered the pulpit, he rested motionless in his chair, yielding himself to the luxury of the sensations that had been roused by the music.

At the conclusion of the sermon, eager for more of that which so soon would be unattainable, he determined to remain to the end of the service. A large number of

people left the cathedral, and he moved up nearer to the choir, with the object of securing a better seat, but with no intention of communicating.

When the departing congregation had cleared away, his eyes were drawn towards a kneeling figure in front. Something in its outline was familiar. The head, with short abundant black hair, was bowed in silent prayer. The worshipper was no idle visitor ; nor had he come to have his ears tickled or his senses steeped in superb harmonies. The music that echoed through arch and aisle was unheeded in the effort to raise the spirit to God. The man was there to pray, and his prayerful attitude was unchanged until the first chords of the *Gloria* were struck. As prayer passed into a glorious song of praise, the worshipper lifted his head and Wenaston caught a glimpse of the features. Astounded beyond measure—he could not have explained why—he recognised Ananda.

When the service ended he rose, and allowing the Hindu to pass out before him, caught him up at the west door. Ananda's eyes were not upon the crowd that jostled him, and he did not observe Wenaston's presence. In their dark depths shone the light of a great happiness mingled with that exaltation which may be seen in the eyes of the convert. Wenaston's surprise was not lessened as he noted it.

“ You ! Ananda ! ”

The Hindu turned at once and held out his hand.

“Dr. Wenaston! We thought that you were still in the south of England!”

“I have been there; but my leave is getting short, and I have come to town to prepare for my journey back to India. Mrs. Twyford did not tell you that I am to lunch with you all to-day?”

“She said nothing about it.”

Wenaston gazed at him with searching eyes.

“How is it that I find you in St. Paul’s?” he asked, adding as an after-thought. “And not as a spectator.”

“Because I have taken a momentous step. I have become a Christian.”

“Is this the Professor’s doing?” asked Wenaston, after a slight pause.

“No,” replied Ananda, readily. “The Professor had nothing to do with my act.”

“Tell me about it.”

They walked along the deserted city streets where a few well-dressed folk were strolling and an occasional omnibus rolled noisily by.

“After Coomara’s death I was very much troubled. I could not bear to think of his fate. Sometimes I was overwhelmed with grief on his account; sometimes I was beside myself with terror on my own, lest a like fate should overtake me. It became more than I could bear. The Professor was very kind. He tried to console me with some of his own doctrines, and suggested that I should draw comfort from them without necessarily

adopting Christianity. As you know, it was one of the conditions imposed by my father on the Professor that there should be no attempt on his part at proselytising. Being an honourable man, he kept faith with my father."

"How did it come about, then?"

"A curious thing happened. One of the English students living in the house introduced me to the mother and sister of the aviator who was killed that day. In my grief and trouble over Coomara's fate I had almost forgotten the accident. I spoke to them about it, and told them of my own sorrow. They were goodness itself. To my astonishment I saw that they were bearing their grief with a resignation that put me to shame. It was their belief—their unshaken faith in the future that gave them strength. They were so sure, so certain that their beloved one was safe with God and happier than he could ever be on earth. I marvelled at their peace of mind, and asked myself why I should not share it. Sorrow had made them very tender towards the trouble of others. In short, it was through them that I changed my religion. They introduced me to their vicar. Unknown to the Professor, I put myself under instruction, and three weeks ago I was baptized."

"Without consulting your guardian?"

"Without his knowledge. He knows now. I did not wish to compromise him, and I begged my friends to keep my secret until I was baptized. I am of age, and can please myself."

He looked up at Wenaston, as if to hear what he had to say, and whether he approved.

“You ought to have told Twyford.”

Ananda’s hands were lifted in a little gesture of deprecation.

“I was afraid, afraid of losing my new-found happiness. I was afraid of opposition from Bopaul if he knew. I was afraid lest the Professor should want me to write first to my father and obtain his consent. I was afraid——”

He paused, and Wenaston remarked with a gravity in which there was concern and doubt—

“You may in truth say that you have taken a momentous step. God give you strength to be no longer afraid.”

CHAPTER IV

CHIRAPORE, the capital of the large native state of Chirakul was situated on plateau land. In the months of March and April the thermometer rose above ninety degrees ; but the rest of the year the climate was sub-tropical in character, and accounted cool as compared with the plains.

The plateau was bounded on one side by hills—spurs of the Western Ghats—where the virgin forest nestled in the ravines and valleys, and big game wandered free and unmolested by the war of extermination that progressive man too often wages in his encroachment upon nature.

Between the hills and Chirapore lay fields of grain and topes of fruit trees, the latter always green in the subtropical climate ; there was a continual passing from seed-time to harvest, from flower to fruit without the paralysing inactivity induced by the hard winters of the temperate zone, or the fiery tropical summers of the torrid regions.

The city itself was built upon undulating ground, its centre being the old fort. Before British rule was established the inhabitants of Chirapore lived as near

to the fort as was possible, seeking protection from the guns ; but in later days, when there was no longer any fear of Mahratta horsemen, they ventured further afield, and the town was extended upon the smiling plateau in nobler lines. Handsome roads lined with private houses or shops intersected the suburbs. Many of the larger dwellings were older than the roads, and stood within their own grounds, a wall dividing them from the public way and ensuring the privacy essential to the happiness of caste families.

It was in one of these substantial mansions that Ananda's father, known as Pantulu Iyer, lived. It had belonged to the family for several generations. In course of time Ananda would inherit it with the silk farms and looms by which Pantulu and his immediate ancestors had accumulated a considerable fortune. As is usual with families of good caste and wealth, the members were numerous, including relatives of near and distant degree. There was no lack of room for them in the large house ; and many of them gave their services in the domestic work of cooking and housekeeping.

Pantulu's wife, a woman of character, full of pride and caste prejudice, ruled the household with a firm but not unkind hand. Her position was strengthened by the fact that she was her husband's first and only wife. She had given him a son, and he was satisfied. Ananda had fulfilled all their dearest expectations ; and as has already been stated, the parents had sent him to England

to complete an education that should eventually fit him for a post in the Maharajah's Government, an assistant-commissionership ; and later, perhaps, a place on the Council. To a father's ambition for his son there is no limit. Pantulu saw no reason why his son should not one day step into the Dewan's shoes should an opportunity occur.

The time approached for the return of the son of the house. News had been received of Coomara's death, but not a word had been said of the effect it had produced upon Ananda, nor of the grave consequences that had ensued.

Bopaul, travelling with his friend, was careful to drop no hint. He knew intuitively that the step Ananda had taken could not fail to rouse a disastrous storm. Bopaul had a fastidious dislike to storms ; and the longer the announcement of the change of religion could be deferred the better pleased he would be. He was in no way responsible for the actions of the other ; but it was possible that he might be drawn into the trouble that it must inevitably raise.

During the voyage out the subject of Ananda's change of religion was not mentioned between the two friends. Bopaul felt strongly that there was nothing to be said one way or the other. The deed was done and could not be undone. If the step had only been under contemplation and not irrevocably taken, he might have urged delay, consultation with the head of the family, consideration for the feelings of others besides himself.

It was too late for all that ; therefore it was useless to discuss it, and he kept a discreet silence.

Ananda attended the services held on Sunday for the benefit of the passengers and ship's officers. No one spoke to him on the subject of religion or attempted to win his confidence. His history was not known nor were his companions aware, with the exception of Bopaul, that he had accepted Christianity. He followed the service reverently ; and if any one troubled himself with conjectures, he probably came to the conclusion that the young man had received baptism. For all that was known he might have been born a Christian.

Bopaul glanced at the peaceful face of his friend when he rejoined him on deck after the service, and wondered if Ananda realised what was before him. Of a nature inclined to shrink from any violent display of emotion, how would he meet the turbulent passions that would be roused in every member of his family as soon as the news was told. Did he realise all that was involved ? He had been well instructed in the doctrines of Hinduism by his guru ; and he had duly performed the various ceremonies prescribed at different periods of childhood and youth by the laws of his religion. What thought was it that stirred in his mind as he leaned on the taffrail and looked pensively down at the seething white froth churned by the passage of the big ship through the waters of the Indian Ocean ?

Bopaul would have lifted his eyebrows in amused

surprise could he have seen the figure that filled the mental vision of his friend. It was none other than Dorama, the young wife to whom after a long absence he was returning.

When the marriage took place bride and bridegroom were but children. The depths of their emotions were unruffled by the honeymoon which was spent, according to custom, three years later under the paternal roof. Two or three years of placid married life followed, during which Ananda was still absorbed in his studies, and Dorama was engaged in housewifely duties under the supervision of an autocratic mother-in-law, who was not unkind, but rigidly exacting, with no leaning whatever towards modern innovations.

Then came the birth of the son. Ananda found it a little difficult to believe that he had really attained the much-desired estate of paternity. He let his eyes rest on the girl-mother and his child with wondrous delight. The sight of them stirred him strangely, and awoke new longings that he did not understand. Those longings were the instinctive desires of the animal man to claim his mate for himself ; and to carry her and her baby to some remote fastness, where he could hide her from the swarms of relatives who in their joy seemed to think that she belonged to them rather than to him. He wanted to gloat over her beauty, her wifehood and her motherhood, and to exult in sole possession. What did it mean ? It almost awed him in its strength and insistence. Surely he was not rebelling against the

time-honoured custom of the family life ! He was not seeking to leave the home of his fathers !

Then came the journey to England and the separation. The underlying, scarcely recognised discontent vanished with the excitement of travel ; but the memory of Dorama in her new character did not fade. On the contrary, it grew clearer and more beautiful the longer he cherished it, gathering romance and raising the wife far above all other women.

He determined that he would ask his father to give him a house of his own on his return with a suitable establishment over which his wife could rule. The plan commended itself for more reasons than one. Since he had changed his religion and adopted many western habits as well, his parents, who were people of discernment, could not fail to understand the necessity for some such arrangement. They might not like it ; they might not be pleased that those western habits were adopted ; they would assuredly disapprove of the change of religion ; but when they comprehended that the changes had been effected to increase the comfort and happiness, spiritually as well as bodily, of their son, they would become reconciled. In sending him to England they must have been aware of the risks he ran of assimilating the ideas of the people among whom he had to live in such close intimacy. The doubts that troubled the keener-witted Bopaul did not therefore ruffle his serenity. He had no forebodings of the thunder-clouds that were gathering.

Pantulu, in company with Bopaul's father, went to Bombay to meet the mail boat. They decided not to go on board, but to await the coming of the travellers on the landing-stage. As Ananda and his companion stepped ashore with the throng of passengers the two men pressed forward. The sons folded their hands in reverence, and then extended the right in the clasp that is general in these days all over the world. The greeting attracted no attention, so quiet was it in its nature; but underneath the simple formalities lay a feeling too deep for words. Later, when the luggage had been disposed of and they were in the privacy of their own sitting-room in the hotel, Ananda, who had been unusually silent, spoke.

"I have something to say, my beloved and honourable father."

At the words Bopaul sprang to his feet.

"Come, sir," he said to his father, "we will leave his Excellency Pantulu Iyer with my friend Ananda to talk over their private affairs——"

Before the older man could rise, Ananda said hastily—

"Stop, Bopaul! I wish you to remain and hear what I have to say. Possibly I may have to ask you to confirm my statement. My father may otherwise find it difficult of belief."

Bopaul reseated himself, looking ill at ease. His father, influenced by a suddenly roused curiosity, which he had no scruples in satisfying, showed a disinclination to move. The eyes of both parents were

fixed in surprise upon the sons, and they waited breathless to hear what communication Ananda had to make to his father.

Pantulu had removed his turban and replaced it by a velvet cap that covered his shaven head and the knot of hair on the crown. He had drawn his feet up beneath him, and his thoughts, if they were occupied at all, were busy building up a gilded future, in which his son was the chief figure. It took some seconds to detach his mind from his ambitious visions and concentrate it upon the fact that Ananda had something to say. In his old-fashioned opinion, children listened ; it was for the parents to speak.

With mild astonishment he fixed his eyes upon his son. No suspicion of the blow that was impending crossed his mind. Doubtless Ananda was going to suggest an extension of the visit to Bombay that they might see a little of the Presidency town before going south.

“My father, I hope that it will not trouble you to learn that during my residence in England I have adopted many of the ways of that country.”

“They will soon pass off, my son, when you return home and find yourself in the family once more. It is well to have a knowledge now-a-days of western customs, many of which the Maharajah himself has adopted. The time may come when you will often find yourself in his presence. Your English experience will serve you well on those occasions.”

Ananda listened in silence without interrupting the speaker. Bopaul showed more uneasiness, rising from his chair and moving restlessly about the room as though longing to escape.

“I have learned to like the ways I have adopted—and the dress.”

Ananda glanced down at the neat frock coat and trousers that became his figure and set it off to advantage.

“Our Maharajah wears the same kind of garments. There is no reason why you should not retain the dress in public.”

“I intend to retain the dress and habits of English life,” he replied with decision. Then, after a slight pause that seemed to the listeners to be shadowed by some strange unknown danger, he continued: “But this is not all. After much thought and deliberation I have also adopted the religion of England.”

A dead silence greeted this announcement. Its full meaning did not immediately strike the listeners. Bopaul glanced from one to the other. The expression on the face of his own father held his attention. It was a curious mixture of astonishment, dismay, and incredulity. The jaw dropped; the eyes opened to their widest extent, and the brows were like two rainbows, so arched had they become. Bopaul had that insane desire to laugh which seizes men and women at a crisis fraught with possible disaster; he turned his back on the company to hide his trembling lips. An inarticulate sound made him look round. It came from

his own parent, who struggled in vain to frame a question.

Bopaul divined its import. Was he, too, a renegade, a 'vert? He controlled his lips and strangled his ill-timed mirth. A sign in the negative set his father's mind at rest on that point, and enabled the older man to give his undivided attention to what was passing between Pantulu and his son.

Pantulu, like his friend, had been struck dumb by the shock of Ananda's statement. He moistened his lips, and after a few ineffectual attempts accomplished articulation. His voice sounded strange and unlike his usual tone.

"You have—adopted—the religion of—England, my son! I fail to grasp your meaning!"

"I have become a Christian."

Ananda spoke clearly, but with a doggedness that seemed a little forced. Under his calmness lurked timidity. Bopaul detected it and again his lips quivered, this time with the ghost of a scornful smile. It required a magnificent courage and enormous endurance for a caste man to make such a change. If he knew Ananda aright his friend had no great store of either courage or endurance. His Christianity would soon be knocked out of him when the family had him back again in the old home away from foreign influences, unless he, Bopaul, was very much mistaken.

Pantulu dropped his feet to the ground, raised himself by the arms of the lounge on which he was seated,

and rose without haste to his full height. The folds of his soft white muslin cloth fell over his lower limbs, the flowing drapery giving him an oriental dignity that was patriarchal. He wore a dark-blue serge coat, a white shirt and linen collar, with tie to match the coat. Everything was of the best quality and fitted his aristocratic well-made figure without fault. On the little finger of his right hand shone a diamond of rare beauty, his only ornament. The sparkle of the gem caught Ananda's eye as the hand was slightly raised in growing horror.

"A Christian! a Christian!" he repeated. Then lowering his hand he seemed to shake off the horror by an effort of will. "I have not understood you, my son. There is some mistake. Whatever strange customs you may have thought fit to adopt during your stay in England, you must drop them now. They have served their purpose, and they must be thrown aside like the strange weeds that as a child you gathered in the jungle, and cast upon the dust heap on your return before entering the house. You have returned to the home of your fathers a Hindu, an orthodox Hindu, a Vishnuvite. Even now at this moment the Swami, our guru, waits at our house in Chirapore to see the ceremonies performed that will restore your caste and purify you from the pollution of these western habits."

The voice grew firmer until it rang out like a sharply-struck bell. Yet for all its firmness there was a strain of desperate entreaty running through it, as though the speaker waited in passionate hope for confirmation of his

assertions. That confirmation did not come. Ananda, as he stood before his father, shifted uneasily from one foot to the other; and as the elder ceased speaking he said falteringly—

“No caste ceremonies will be required. I have given up Hinduism. I have been baptised and received into the English Church. It is not necessary to look so serious over it, honoured father. All that will be needed can be done without difficulty. It will be advisable to give me a separate house and establishment for myself and my wife and son, since our presence will naturally create trouble for my mother in the preparation of food. I am also prepared to find that many members of your household may demand my exclusion from the family circle.”

Ananda's even voice appeared to have a paralysing effect upon both the older men; for they were silent. Bopaul's father was the first to find his tongue.

“My friend, I am sorry for this. It is an unspeakable misfortune.”

Pity, unsolicited and unexpected, and equally unwelcome, broke the spell and opened the floodgates of wrath. Again the diamond flashed as the paternal hand was raised.

“A Christian! My son a cursed Christian! an outcaste! an alien! lower than the pariah, more loathed than the punchama sweeper! Oh! what have I done that the gods should curse me thus? What sin have I committed that I should be thus afflicted and punished? My son! my only son!” Once more a

desperate effort was made to reject, to disbelieve the terrible news. "My little son!" he used the pet name by which Ananda had been known as a child, and it came from his lips with infinite tenderness. "My little son! tell me you have but joked, and that you have been playing upon your poor old father's fears. Be satisfied that you have startled and frightened him. Now reassure him! restore him to happiness, my little son! Be kind and tender in your strong young manhood to one who is growing old and whose life is bound up in yours."

He placed his hands together, palm to palm, and bowed his proud head in humble entreaty. Bopaul once more turned his back upon the company and strode towards one of the windows. The sight of Pantulu's grief and distress pained him more than he cared to admit.

Ananda did not hear the appeal unmoved. Tears sprang into his eyes, and he too averted his gaze from a sight that sent a sharp knife through his heart; but, like all weak natures, he possessed a strain of obstinacy that came now to his assistance. Bopaul, who had more force of character, could not have listened to such an appeal from his father without wavering in his determination, no matter how great might have been his courage. With Ananda it had a contrary effect. It distressed and pained him beyond expression; but it strengthened rather than weakened his resolve, and created a desire to justify his action. He answered firmly and decisively, and in that answer his father

recognised the obstinacy of the perverse boy who so often succeeded in getting his own way in spite of his timid nature.

“It is true. I am a Christian, and I intend to remain a Christian. I am sorry if it hurts you, my father; but I have arrived at man’s estate and must judge for myself. I have taken the step deliberately and with due thought and consideration.”

“This is the Professor’s doing, him to whom I entrusted you!” cried Pantulu, his wrath rising hotly.

“No, it is not! The Professor had nothing to do with it!” replied Ananda, in a sharp, clear voice. He turned to Bopaul, who was still standing with his back to them. “Reassure my father on this point, please. Had Professor Twyford or his family anything to do with the step I have taken?”

“To the best of my belief, none. He showed as much astonishment when you announced the change as I felt myself. What was more, he was terribly disturbed by the news.”

Pantulu made no comment on this confirmation of his son’s story, and Ananda began again.

“It happened in this way——”

“Silence!” thundered his father, in a voice that made them all start. “When the dhoby’s donkey falls into the tank, does it bring him to life again to explain what caused his foot to slip? Thou art cursed! cursed! cursed! No longer shalt thou be a son of mine! I am childless! Go from my sight, and never let my eyes fall upon thee again!”

He used the language usually addressed to inferiors, and it stung.

“ Let me explain, most excellent father —— ”

“ Call me not father, son of a dog ! ”

“ If you would only let me speak, I can—— ”

“ Sooner would I listen to the ‘ untouchable ’ who cleans the gutters and carries away the contents of the dustbin ! Go ! ”

He moved towards him threateningly. Ananda stepped back a pace or two, but did not show any sign of leaving the room.

“ It is not fair to judge any one unheard,” he began again ; but he was not allowed to finish the sentence. Pantulu, beside himself with rage, advanced with uplifted hand and brought his fist down upon his son’s face. The diamond caught his lip and tore it open. Blood flowed and dropped upon the white shirt-front, leaving a large red stain.

Bopaul rushed forward, interposing himself between the two, and pushed his friend through the doorway leading to his bedroom.

The outraged father glared after his son and panted out in gasps—

“ Never in the whole course of the boy’s life have I laid a hand upon him. What have I done ! What have I done ! ”

He sank down into his chair and covered his face with his hands. Joy, ambition, paternal pride, all had been extinguished, leaving him a broken and miserable man.

CHAPTER V

FOR the past twelve months the family of Pantulu Iyer had been preparing for the return of the son and heir. In the first place Gunga, Ananda's mother, had undertaken a pilgrimage to the large Vishnuvite temple at Srirungam, near Trichinopoly. She was a proud woman, full of energy, just but strict in the performance of duties, religious as well as social. She demanded of others the same rigid adherence to rule, and she countenanced no indulgence nor slackness in young or old among her dependents. By her decree Dorama and her little son were to accompany her.

The journey would have been easy by rail; but Pantulu's wife was not a woman to look for ease and comfort where ceremonial was concerned. She chose the way of her ancestors and elected to travel by road as they had travelled in the old days before the fire-carriage revolutionised the Indian methods of journeying.

It took many days, even though she used her own powerful bullocks. Besides the coach there was a country cart which carried the cooking-pots, bedding, and her own caste servants. The people of the villages through which she passed inquired the name of the

gracious lady who honoured their poor hamlet by her presence. The reply was given by the drivers ; she was the wife of a rich silk merchant of Chirapore, carrying offerings to the big temple at Srirungam. Why did she make offerings ? Was her husband sick ? No ; it was because her son who had been to England was returning, and she was anxious to enlist the favour of the gods so that he might be restored to her in safety. The country folk received the information with much salaaming, and expressed a hope that she would be favoured. They supplied her with eggs and milk ; and admired the fine handsome white cattle that drew her coach, praising the drooping ears and swinging dew-laps in loud tones that were intended to penetrate the curtains that hung before the windows of the carriage.

At the big temple she was honourably received. The gifts she brought were presented by her tiny grandson in the absence of any other male member of the family.

The little Royan, named after his great-grandfather, was decked in purple velvet and crimson satin ; and his small person was laden with jewels of gold and precious stones. The soft baby hand, timidly extended to the awe-inspiring mahunt—who graciously deigned to receive the offerings in person—was weighed down by the solid gold lime resting on his palm. The great man smiled as he stooped and received the substantial gift. By the side of the child stood his grandmother, erect in her hale middle-age. Her limbs had not yet lost the

lines of a comely youth, nor the features their haughty beauty.

Half hidden behind her was the smaller figure of Dorama, her eyes cast down, her rich silk cloth, plain in colour and pattern, veiling her lately-developed form. The eyes of the mahunt dwelt upon her as he asked a few questions. He learned that her husband was in England, and would be returning some time during the year.

"She will rejoin him and give you another grandson to rejoice your heart," said the mahunt.

"It may be so if the gods will," replied Gunga in a tone that seemed to dismiss the subject.

"Should your hopes not be fulfilled you must make another pilgrimage to the temple, and she must keep vigil before the god. It cannot fail to bring about the desired result."

To this proposition the elder lady made no reply, and the mahunt retired, casting another glance of approval upon Dorama.

After a few days' rest, Gunga returned as she went, making the journey by easy stages. The nights were spent at the various rest-houses on the road, where her attendants cooked the food and saw to her comfort. She chose a time when the weather promised to be fine, and it did not disappoint her. The expedition was a pleasant jaunt, which Dorama enjoyed more than a little.

On her return home Gunga superintended other preparations considered necessary for the occasion.

The whole household—with all its dependents and caste servants numbering over fifty—had to be fitted out with new clothes. The little close-fitting jackets of bright colours affected by the women were fashioned by careful tailors. Men's coats of brilliant cloth, lined with silk and richly embroidered with gold, were put in hand. New lengths of muslin of the finest quality were purchased after careful and deliberate bargaining; and many of the family jewels were reset.

It was in these heirlooms that Dorama was most interested. According to time-honoured custom among modest Hindu women, she had laid aside her jewels on her husband's departure; nor was she permitted to use the golden saffron powder that is supposed to enhance the beauty of the Indian skin. With his return all restriction of self-adornment would end; and the finest and best of the jewels would be hung about her own neck and arms; and her smooth skin would gleam with powder that would match the newly-burnished gold.

The tailors needed supervision; the working goldsmiths required individual watching. A member of the family, usually one of the elder women, was told off to sit by his crucible and work-table whilst he plied his bellows and his delicate styles; and the half-finished ornament was carried home in the evening to be restored to the jeweller in the morning when the person in charge was able to resume her guard.

Then there were the preparations that belonged to the kitchen, the chutneys, pickles, and preserves that

would be required when the time arrived for feasting and feeding the poor Brahmans.

Dorama assisted under her mother-in-law's directions, lending a hand here and there where special care was needed. She was very silent ; but beneath that silence was hidden a fire of emotions varied and deep that the others little dreamed of. She thought of her wedding, long ago when she was but a child. At the time the ceremonies had excited her wonder, and she had experienced a fearful pleasure in the thought that she was the centre of attention. She remembered Ananda's smooth boyish face and his gentle acquiescence to all his parents' wishes. He had glanced at his newly-made wife with childish curiosity, in which passion and desire found no place.

Later the parents arranged a honeymoon for the young couple, to be spent under the paternal roof. On her side, at least, there was nothing but distaste and fear, with not a little grief at having to leave her own home. Then ensued a dull period when light household tasks instead of dolls and toys filled her life. It ended in the birth of a son. With the advent of the baby she was released from domestic work in the kitchen ; and though she found that the wonderful living doll was not her exclusive property, but seemed to belong to the whole house as much as to her, existence had a new interest.

Before she was sufficiently recovered to take her new place as the favoured young mother of a son in the family circle, Ananda departed. She remembered how

he had knelt by her side and looked at the tiny baby, their joint property, with a kind of delighted surprise, as though he found it difficult to realise that the little crumpled olive ball of humanity was his own, his very own. From his child his eyes went to his child's mother with a light in them that she had never seen there before. She was no longer one of the mere goods and chattels of the house to help to minister to his appetite, feed him, keep his clothes in order and perform other duties that contributed to his comfort and well-being. In giving him this son, who would one day call him by the name most highly prized throughout the land, she had done something purely personal, something exclusively for him; and in so doing she had endowed him with a delight and joy unknown before.

It was impossible for him to express his gratitude in words. The presence of his mother standing near with her dark, watchful eyes kept him silent. He could only gaze from wife to child and then back again at his wife. In his shining eyes, full of unspoken happiness, the girl might read what she pleased. Even as he knelt by the mat on which she lay the new longing arose to possess, to enjoy, to claim his own, and carry his precious treasures away.

The watching mother detected the emotion, and a twinge of jealousy caused her to stir uneasily. She advanced and laid a hand upon his shoulder, her gold bracelets ringing as they fell together upon her wrist with the movement.

“Come away, my son ; she is still weak, and unable to bear a long farewell. Be assured that we will keep her safe and sound till you return, her and her little son.”

Ananda bent lower over the recumbent figure, and his mother’s brow contracted as she saw the motion.

“Beloved ! keep your heart warm for your absent husband,” he whispered, as he kissed the beautiful mouth.

Dorama, as a well-behaved married woman, should have shown no emotion beyond grief. She should have received the kiss and the words in silence, allowing the eyelids to droop under his ardent gaze ; but in these latter days of progress the orthodox Hindu feels the insensible breath of the new spirit, and yields to it without actually breaking away from the old rules. That same spirit moved her to put her arms round his neck and to draw him down again till their lips touched a second time.

“Do not be long, beloved. The slave waits impatiently for her lord.”

“Come ! come ! The carriage is ready, and his honour, your father, is impatient to be off,” said the voice of his mother, as once more her hand rested on his shoulder.

He rose to his feet and accompanied her without another word, turning once only to look back and smile at the eyes that followed him so wistfully. Neither husband nor wife forgot the incident. Every detail, every look and word were engraved upon their memories, and with this their aching hungry hearts had to be contented until they should meet again.

As the time drew near for Ananda's return Dorama moved like one in a dream. During the day she was abstracted and thoughtful, except when she was with her little son. If by any chance she could carry him out of hearing of the other members of the family on pretence of giving him the air, she spoke of his father, pouring out the pent-up feeling in words, the meaning of which was beyond the child's comprehension. It brought relief, although it did not allay the terrible longing.

When the pink satin coat that Royan was to wear on his father's home-coming was finished, Dorama stole away to the little room she had shared with her husband, and slipped it on. The boy's eyes sparkled with delight at the colour and sheen.

"Your father is coming, blessed one ! Say ' Father, excellent father ! Your son and slave throws himself before your honourable footsteps ! ' Say it ! Ah, good child ! It was well done ! Now again ; and carry the hand to the forehead, thus ! Good, little one ! Mother's joy ! "

Suddenly the sound of Gunga's voice fell on her ear as some order was given in the distance to one of the dependents.

" Ah ! there is the grandmother ! Quick ! take it off ! The coat is only to be worn in the presence of your father. "

She pulled it off, the child entering into the fun and excitement of doing something that must be hidden from the rigid mistress of the house. When the coast was

clear Dorama crept back, the coat hidden under her saree and her finger on her lips. The purloined garment was replaced in the clothes chest without discovery, and the two, laughing like a couple of mischievous children, ran away in happy glee over their secret.

At night she lay on her mat in the large room appropriated to the women of the household, wakeful with busy thought and anticipation. The deep breathing and occasional snore of her companions told her that they slept soundly. Then she ventured to move, to stretch her young limbs and sit up. Her brain seemed on fire. Would her mother give them again the little room ; or would the son of the house be honoured by being assigned a larger and more important chamber ? Would he be altered in any way ? Possibly he had grown older in appearance, stronger in limb, more manly. How the women of England must have admired him ! Hateful creatures ! She detested English women ! What was there to admire in them ? They were blocks of ice with hard, cold, white skins and unkind eyes. She had never seen them except in the streets as they drove past in carriages or motors ; but she was quite convinced that she read their characters aright, and that her opinion of them was correct.

She heard the cocks crowing as they marked the progress of the night. In the midst of her musings she fell asleep, and dreamed that he had come, that he leaned over her in greeting as he had leaned in parting, and that their lips met once more.

Among other preparations was the painting and decoration of the house. As the time approached venetian masts were erected and wreaths suspended the length of the road in which they lived. Bunches of leaves and flowers were tied to the beams of the house, and whole plantain trees bearing their large clusters of golden fruit were fastened to every pillar.

Then the guru with his disciple arrived; and the purohit from the temple, to superintend the ceremonies that were necessary for the restoration of caste. Gunga, in the absence of her husband in Bombay, gave the holy men a welcome, and saw that nothing was omitted that was conducive to their comfort.

As the time drew near the whole household felt the thrill of expectation that never fails to move a family when one of its members is expected home after a long sojourn in foreign lands. What news there would be to hear, and to tell ! The traveller would bring gifts for all. No one would be forgotten.

One morning a post peon appeared carrying a telegram. It was addressed to Pantulu's brother, Sooba, the little master, as he was called ; and it announced that the ship had come in safely and that the passengers would land that afternoon.

"Is there anything in the telegram about the time they will leave Bombay ? " asked the guru's attendant, as he waited to carry news to the great man. Gunga handed him the message in its brown envelope. Ten minutes later he returned.

“The master says that they will start to-morrow probably, either by the morning or evening mail, according to the time it takes to clear the luggage through the custom house.”

The guru was well versed in matters temporal as well as spiritual.

“When may we expect them ? ” asked Gunga.

“It takes two nights and a day to travel from Bombay to Chirapore,” replied the disciple. “If they leave to-morrow night they will be here on Wednesday morning.”

“The day before the new moon ! Not a lucky day to be travelling south,” remarked Gunga, with a troubled expression upon her face. “If my husband remembers to go out of the house in which he is staying by a north door, the bad luck may be averted.”

“He will surely think of it,” observed the disciple, whose life was occupied in the consideration of omens.

“In the joy of meeting his son it is quite possible that it may be forgotten. I know that my lord will be nearly beside himself with delight at seeing his boy again, his only child ! ” she added softly, with a tenderness that she rarely exhibited.

That same afternoon a second telegram was received. It said “Disperse guests. Discontinue preparations for feasting and rejoicing.”

Gunga listened speechless as her brother-in-law read it aloud.

“Again,” she commanded.

He read it a second and a third time.

“Is there nothing about illness? Is no reason given for these strange orders?”

“None, most honourable mother of my brother’s family.”

“Call his excellency, the swami.”

The guru, full of curiosity, came at the summons without delay. He read the message more than once, but was unable to throw any more light upon its meaning.

“A letter will come with full explanations,” he said at last. “Until its arrival the directions of the master of the house must be carried out. My disciple shall tell the company of beggars who are already assembling that there will be no feasting. He had better give them an anna apiece, which you will provide, and say that they will be called together again on the arrival of the master.”

“What can be the cause of this change?” asked Gunga, her dark eyes fixed with a questioning gaze upon the guru.

“Illness, perhaps, or an accident.”

“My son is not dead!” she cried in sudden terror.

“No, that cannot be; nor can there be any dangerous illness. It is possible that your son may have missed his ship, in which case he will arrive by the next mail boat a week later. We shall learn in time. Meanwhile, I will go on my way to another house, where my presence is needed, and will hold myself in readiness to return a fortnight hence.”

Pantulu’s wife felt slightly relieved by the suggestion that her son might be coming a week later. It was

better than entertaining the fear that he was ill or even dead. She accepted the situation, and set about carrying out her husband's directions at once. The new clothes were packed away in camphor-wood boxes ; the pickles and preserves were tied down and put in the storeroom. The women were ordered to cease grinding curry-stuffs and pounding rice. The busy household dropped into sudden inaction, and an unnatural silence reigned everywhere. The women spoke in whispers, and the men betook themselves to the bazaar, or to the houses of their fellow-caste people, where they discussed the ominous message from Bombay without fear of being overheard by the stern woman who ruled the family.

Dorama with the rest had listened as the telegram was read out. Every word of it was engraven upon her brain. She went over it again and again, puzzling herself to find a reason for the strange mandate. If Ananda had missed his ship surely his father would have said so. On the other hand, if there was illness or an accident to cause delay, it might easily have been told in a few words. Some mystery lay beneath it. What could it be ? Had Ananda lost his senses and become mad with the joy of his home-coming ? She had known cases of temporary loss of the senses through excessive joy or grief.

The child plucked at her saree, jealous of her abstraction. She caught him up and crushed his soft little body to her heart.

“ Thus and thus will thy father hug thee and me, my son, when he comes ! ”

The boy, irritated at being roughly handled, beat at her with his small fists.

“ Thus and thus will I beat my father if he hurts me like that. Let me go, or I will ask him to find me another mother.”

The senseless words fell upon her ear with strange force. What was it the child said ? Another mother ! Could it be possible that her husband had forgotten her in that foreign country, where he had lived so long ? Was he bringing home another wife ? a white woman, a hated European ? No, no ! It was impossible ! ”

With a stifled cry she set the child down on his feet, and he seized the opportunity of escaping to the kitchen, the spot he loved best. She was left alone, and no one heeded her ; they were all too busy discussing the mystery of the message and attempting to discover its solution. Suddenly she dropped to the ground, crouching as though some unseen hand were about to strike a deadly blow, her hands lifted to guard her head.

“ No ! no ! no ! If there were another I could not bear it. I should die ! ” she wailed. Then passion took hold of her. She stuffed the corner of her saree into her mouth and bit it savagely. “ No, I will not die ! It is the strange woman who shall die ! Hear me, swami of the big temple ! Hear my vow. I will live and have my own ! my own ! ”

CHAPTER VI

THE house in which Bopaul's father lived was situated in the same road, about a hundred yards distant, and on the opposite side. It was nearer the town, and though a substantial building, was not as large as the silk merchant's; nor was the compound as extensive. A similar preparation had been made by the family, but not on so large or expensive a scale; nor had the mistress thought it necessary to go on a pilgrimage. New clothes had been bought, and store-rooms were replenished. The house had been repainted and decorated.

There was no young wife with her little son to await the coming of Bopaul; but his bride was already chosen, and the marriage ceremony would be performed as soon as the restoration of caste was accomplished. She would not be present at his home-coming. The girl was a stranger to him, and he had yet to make her acquaintance. As in Pantulu's family, there were many relatives and dependents who performed the duties of servants; but claimed a right to share in the rejoicings as relations.

One forlorn little figure in that busy happy company was not a participator in the joy of Bopaul's return.

This was his own sister Mayita, married in her infancy to Coomara. By Coomara's death she had become a widow, although she had been only a wife in name. Her degradation was aggravated by the fact that her husband had died abroad, with the funeral ceremonies, in which she should have taken a certain part, unperformed.

In dying out of his country the dead man was laid, as we have seen, under the ban of broken caste. It was irrevocably broken, no ritual having ever been devised by which it could be restored.

Dressed once more as a bride—this time in bitter mockery—the jewels had been stripped from her neck and arms ; her head was shaven ; the glass bangles of her childhood were broken upon her wrists. Never would she forget, young as she was, the crash of glass as the delicate circles were splintered under a sharp, irritable blow that in itself indicated how deeply her fate was resented by the family. The soft brown-and-gold saree that harmonised with her complexion was ruthlessly unwound with unnecessary force as she stood weeping and unresisting in the hands of the wailing women. It was thrown aside as though defiled by contact with her half-developed form. In place of it she was obliged to wear a coarse cotton cloth, with rough edges, that chafed her tender skin and brought her unfortunate condition constantly to mind.

No pity was felt for the shrinking, miserable girl as she flitted like a ghost about the house, avoiding with

painful care young and old alike, lest her shadow should fall upon them and bring bad luck. In the preparations for her brother's return she had no part. When his eye should first fall upon her, he ought by all precedent to curse her, and command her to get out of his sight. It was this thought that hurt her most, and caused a sharper grief than she had felt for the loss of her husband. She was but thirteen years old. A vivid memory remained of the brother who in old days had been invariably kind. The longing to see him again was great; and many a secret tear was shed at the thought that she might no more bask in the sunshine of his fraternal love.

In the caste family that is poor the widow becomes the drudge of the house. It is often a blessing in disguise, if the work is not made too heavy, as it gives occupation for the mind. In Bopaul's family it was not necessary for Mayita to occupy that position. There were plenty of people to do the work, and she was not called upon to take any part in the household duties. She would have been happier for a little employment; but she was denied both work and play. The other children refused to allow her to join their games; and when she approached the women who ground the curry-stuffs, pounded and cleaned the rice, tended the kitchen fires or polished the numerous brass pots, they one and all motioned her away. If she begged to be given occupation of some sort, they set her a task that had perforce to be executed in solitude.

She sought her mother, but here again she was

repulsed ; not by rough words, but by her parent's sighs and tears. Bopaul's mother was a stout, lethargic person, who loved above all things her own comfort. Until her daughter was widowed she was rarely seen without a placid smile of content. She still wore it at times when the misfortune was forgotten. As soon as Mayita appeared the smile faded ; the large, slumbrous eyes filled with tears, and she began her lamentations.

“What sin can my daughter have committed in a former birth that such heavy punishment should be meted out ? ”

Then she would send her with a message to another part of the house, and the child knew that she was not expected to return. If Mayita remained, the wailing was continued.

“The sight of your widowhood is a shame to the whole house. Such a misfortune can only come to those who have in some way grievously offended the gods.”

The accusation of sin in a former birth was repeated so often that at last the girl became possessed with a vague sense of wrong-doing. Its responsibility added to the weight already resting upon the young shoulders, and increased her misery.

Shortly after the receipt of the second telegram, one of the women belonging to Pantulu's family slipped away to carry the news to her neighbours. She was received eagerly with a chorus of questions.

“What news? When do they come? We have heard nothing.”

“It is not known when they arrive.”

“Why do you look so gloomy? Is the news otherwise than good?”

“Yemmah! how can I tell? Aiyoh! to think of such a thing!”

After this enigmatic speech she began to weep with the ready ease of the oriental. The sensation created was gratifying to her vanity. There was a perfect clamour for an explanation.

“What is it? Speak! we are all on fire to learn!”

“The master has sent an order by the wire that there are to be no rejoicings. Aiyoh! to think that the young excellency should return to his father’s house without rejoicings, without feastings and garlandings, and without fireworks and feeding of the poor!”

“What says the mistress?”

“That there has been an accident or an illness, and that their honours, the master and his son are not coming. If there is bad luck it will be the waning moon that will have caused it. Next week all would have gone well. What news has been received in this house? Has the ticking devil sent any message?”

“Only one. It was written on a thin slip of paper, and it came in a brown envelope.”

“What did it say?”

“That the young master had landed in safety, and

that they would leave Bombay by the night mail to-morrow."

"And the rejoicings?"

"There is no order to forbid them."

"Is the swami here?"

"He and his disciple arrived last night."

"Happy house! Happy mistress of an honourable family. She is to be envied."

"Our excellent lady has only one trouble; it is the presence of Coomara's widow."

"What will she do about it? It will bring misfortune on the young master if he meets his sister immediately on arrival."

"She will be locked in the room that opens into the cowyard; and she will be kept there till the middle of the next day. In the afternoon, when there is less fear of the frown of the gods, she may perhaps be permitted to see him; but only if he asks for her."

Other members of Pantulu's household slipped away to carry the news to the neighbours. The story was told and retold with variations till the whole town was agog with curiosity. Many were the surmises, but not a single one came near the true solution of the mystery.

On the morning of the day when Bopaul and his father were expected a large crowd gathered at the railway station to learn what had happened. No one knew whether Pantulu would be in the same train. It was Bopaul to whom they looked for news. Friends and fellow-caste men were permitted on the platform, which

was crowded. A larger number, moved only by curiosity, assembled outside the station.

Chirapore was a terminus. The train arrived and poured forth its load of travellers. Some astonishment was caused by the sight of the large assembly gathered in and round the building ; but the attention of Bopaul and his father was diverted to the recovery of personal baggage from the vans, and their curiosity as to the reason of so big a crowd was lost in anxiety to assure themselves of the safety of their property.

Through the crowd Pantulu and his son pushed their way hastily. So hemmed in were they that they escaped observation except by a few. In the hurry and bustle no attempt was made to detain them for a greeting which could be made with more dignity later. Pantulu led the way, passing straight through the station and out into the public road, where stood a row of carriages for hire. Ananda followed close upon his heels with his suit-case. His two portmanteaux were carried by a couple of coolies and placed without delay upon the roof of a hired gharry.

Father and son stepped into the carriage and were driven off. Not a word passed between them. Ananda was conducted back to the home of his childhood in an ominous silence that chilled him and destroyed all his happiness. He wondered vaguely what his father intended to do with him. He was aware that he could not join the family circle, eat with them, take part in the daily religious worship conducted by his father as

head of the house before the chief meal of the day. His exclusion would have been insisted upon even if he had not taken the momentous step. Until the restoration of caste it was imperative that he should lead a life apart from the rest of the family. It would mean the occupation of an isolated room well away from the kitchen, the taking of his food in solitude, the reservation of earthen drinking vessels exclusively for his own use, to be destroyed afterwards. But with all this there would be nothing to prevent him from meeting the male members of the family in that general place of assembly in all Indian houses, the pial or verandah. There they could talk and he could relate his experiences, and the others might listen without fear of contamination. This condition of affairs might last without personal discomfort to any one for a week or ten days, or even longer, according to the decree of those who conducted the ceremonies for the restoration of caste.

Under the altered circumstances Ananda concluded that the arrangements for his accommodation would be of a permanent nature, and more comfortable than if they were temporary. He would be able to furnish his room to his liking, introducing a few western luxuries, such as an armchair or two, a writing-table, bookcase, a table at which he could sit to take his meals. He could join the family in the pial, but otherwise lead his own life as he had learned to lead it in England. No difficulty presented itself to his mind in the arrangement; in truth, there was none. Provided he did not

force himself upon his family in a manner that would endanger their caste rules, no objection could be made to his staying for a time under his father's roof. Later he would propose the separate house—it might be small and unassuming—where he could live as he pleased with his wife and child.

In the midst of his speculations the noisy ramshackle vehicle drew up before the house. The plantain palms and festoons of green leaves remained where joyful fingers had placed them. The venetian masts that were to have supported ropes of Chinese lanterns had also been left standing, some of them bare of decoration, others gaudy with red and white twists of calico. Not a living creature was visible. The big iron-studded door was closely shut. A few small windows looking towards the road were screened with venetian shutters ; the pial was empty. There was not even the joyous bark of a dog to welcome home the wanderer.

Pantulu stepped out of the carriage and directed the driver to place the two leather portmanteaux on the steps. He kept his back to his son whenever he was able, and studiously averted his gaze. The sight of the wound on his son's face hurt him more than a little. Ananda followed his father, and the coachman was paid and ordered to leave without delay. They waited till he had retreated in a cloud of dust ; and then Ananda, who was impatient of delay, put his foot on the first step of the flight that led up to the pial.

“ Stop ! ” said his father, sternly. “ Follow me ! ”

He gave no explanation, and confined himself to as few words as possible. Leading the way round to the side of the house, he entered the compound and conducted his son to a little outer yard into which opened the door of a room that had no communication with the rest of the building. The room was empty, except for a thick layer of dust and dried leaves blown in by the wind through the open door. A tiny, unglazed, unshuttered window high up under the eaves of the roof, admitted a little light ; but at best the room was but a den, and not fit for the accommodation of a human being, let alone a son of the house.

“Go in and wait there,” said his father, shortly, as though the necessity of addressing his son was repugnant.

“I should like a chair—and a mat ; and surely the room might be swept out with advantage,” said Ananda, looking round with undisguised disgust.

Pantulu avoided meeting his eyes, and walked away without replying. Meanwhile the advent of the gharry had not been unnoticed by the wondering household. The mistress herself, overcome by her curiosity, pressed her forehead against the venetians to peer through a chink and take a look at the arrivals. She could tell by the expression on her husband’s face that something had happened to disturb him greatly. Nothing less than some serious misfortune could bring those deep lines upon his brow and cause the corners of his mouth to droop so ominously. Of one thing she assured herself with some satisfaction. Her son was sound in limb and

well in health ; and she caught her breath in a little sigh of relief.

Dorama, hugging her child close to her breast, stood behind her mother-in-law, listening eagerly for news.

“ Has the excellent father arrived ? ” she ventured to ask at last, unable to repress her curiosity.

A bare affirmative was all she could elicit.

“ Is he alone ? ” she asked presently.

Pantulu's wife shook her head without speaking, and presently moved away from the window. There was a little struggle among the women to secure her place. They were disappointed. The road and the short carriage-drive up to the house were empty except for a distant bullock-cart plodding its way to the market with a sleepy driver, who had eyes for nothing but his cattle.

Gunga went to the back of the house. She had not long to wait. Pantulu, dejected and gloomy, strode in by a door in the wall, passed quickly through the garden, mounted the verandah steps and, without a word, went straight to the front room, into which the big iron-studded door opened. He greeted no one. The men and women who had been waiting in the courtyard and inner rooms salaamed, but he took no notice of their salutations. His wife followed him, and he asked gruffly for his brother. A man some ten years younger than himself came forward and salaamed.

“ All is well with my honoured elder brother ! May the gods continue to smile on him and all his family ! ”

Pantulu suddenly flung his arms up and cried passionately—

“I am cursed! The gods have cursed me—me and my family!”

“In what manner, most excellent master of the house?”

“My son has become a Christian!—my only son! My only child!”

The words rang out sharply and reached the ears of the group that had circled round the master of the house. They were repeated from mouth to mouth with gathering consternation as the catastrophe was gradually realised. Gunga heard them, and at first seemed stunned, so still and silent did she remain. A groan escaped her lips, and the strong, shapely hands gripped the edge of her saree.

“A Christian! What do you say? My ears have played me false. I have not heard aright. My son a Christian? You jest, my husband!”

“It is true!” he replied, in a dull, despairing voice that in itself should have been convincing if she could have brought herself to believe in such a thing; but she fought against it, and refused to entertain the idea.

“Who dares to say that our son has become a Christian?” she asked fiercely.

“His own tongue. He calls himself by the accursed name, and he shows no shame.”

“A Christian! a Christian!” echoed voices round him. “A Christian! a Christian!” was caught

up by the women and repeated with increasing excitement.

“ Oh ! Aiyoh ! Aiyoh ! Aiyoh ! ”

The cry came from Gunga herself. It dominated the chorus of lamentation and silenced every other tongue. Suddenly the sound of a thud upon the floor startled the company. A childish scream followed.

“ Water ! bring water ! ” said one of the women.
“ The lady Dorama has fainted and let the child fall ! ”

CHAPTER VII

ANANDA stood at the open door of the little room looking out at the view. The earth was smiling under the tropical sun. Birds and flowers responded to its tempered heat ; and song and sweet odours were lavishly spent upon the soft air. An oleander bush with its willow foliage tossed trusses of almond-scented, pink blossom, at the entrance of the yard. The luxuriant vine of a gourd spread its thick leafage over a part of the ground enclosed. Just outside a rose bush, laden with clusters of blossoms and buds, threw its thorny branches over the warm, sunbaked, mud wall. A pair of tawny fritillary butterflies fluttered over the petals of the rose, and a blue roller bird flew across the sky, a living streak of brilliant azure upon the ethereal blue haze. Crested hoopoes ran along the base of the wall seeking ants and cooing softly in their contentment.

Above foliage, flower and building rose the noble mountain mass in the distance, with its sholahs of virgin forest, its glades and slopes of green grass and peaks of bare grey rock. Ananda's spirit stirred within him as his eye followed the familiar outline of the beautiful spur of the Western Ghats. How often he had watched

it under its different aspects and learned to love it, whether it was shrouding itself in a grey mantle of rain-laden vapour, or shining through a transparent haze of blue.

He recalled the expeditions of his youth when his father had taken him to the hill for the day and he had returned with the spoil of the forest; ferns and orchids and long supple bamboos, strange leaves and flowers that could not be made to grow in his own garden. He remembered a tiger, caught and speared by the natives, which was brought in by exulting herdsmen to be shown to his father. A hyæna was also carried in in like manner slung upon a green bamboo cut from the forest. He remembered how tightly he had clung to his father's hand in his fear of the big beasts with their strong jaws hanging open and the formidable teeth visible; and how his father reassured him each time, bidding him be brave and behave like a man. Ananda sighed; ah, he would show his own son the same sights, and teach him to be a man!

The thought of the child changed the current of his musings. Where was the boy at the present moment? Where was the boy's mother? Only a wall or two separated them. Why did they not come and greet him? It was perfectly feasible. There was no fear of contamination in the open air. An interview might take place in the little yard or in the compound beyond without detriment to caste.

He listened for the sound of voices. The house was

very silent. The room apportioned to his use was remote from the kitchen and women's quarters ; but with that large family there were usually people moving in all parts of the building.

Nearly an hour passed and he began to grow impatient. He went to the entrance of the yard and stood at the open gateway. A man ran hastily round the corner of the house, his body bent under the load he was carrying. It was one of Ananda's portmanteaux. He approached the gateway and stopped in front of it. Ananda looked him up and down and recognised him as a pariah employed as a sweeper outside the house.

"What are you doing with my luggage?" he demanded angrily.

The man put down his load and prostrated himself, touching the ground with his forehead.

"The master ordered me to bring the two leather boxes belonging to your honour."

"It is not for men such as you are to touch anything belonging to a son of the house."

The pariah put his hands together palm to palm in abject apology and deprecation.

"This lump of mud, this poor worm had no choice but to do the master's bidding. He held his stick over my unprotected body, and threatened to beat me if I did not bring the boxes."

He scrambled to his feet and ran off thankful to escape punishment from the owner of the trunks, and reappeared with the second. Ananda directed him to

leave them at the gateway. When the man had gone he carried them into the room himself. The dust flew in clouds as he set them down one after the other against the wall. The neat dark suit he wore was stained and his fingers soiled. Involuntarily he glanced round for the English washstand for means to rid himself of the offending dust. He smiled at his own ridiculous expectations and turned to the fresh air outside, sweet and pure and refreshing, and cleansed his hands as well as he could on the coarse grass.

A figure approached and he recognised his uncle, Sooba Iyer. His face cleared and he advanced with outstretched hand.

“It is good to see you again, my little father. You are the first to greet me. Where are the rest?”

His uncle drew himself up with a gathering together of his muslin garments and lifted his hand with a warning gesture to arrest further advance. Ananda knew the gesture well. He had seen it often; aye, and practised it himself in days gone by, when accident had brought him near a pariah. No reply was vouchsafed to his question, and he soon discovered the reason for the visit. In abject humility the sweeper appeared, broom in hand.

“Sweep out the room, contemptible one!” said Sooba.

The pariah set to work at once to perform his task to the best of his ability, and wielded his broom till the air was thick, and a large heap of rubbish was accumulated. The elder man stood silently in the enclosure,

holding himself ready to avoid contamination by touch or shadow. If there was relaxation at all it was towards the sweeper rather than his nephew.

“I don’t know why I should be treated in this way,” protested Ananda. “Broken caste is broken caste. I am in no worse case as a Christian than I was as a Hindu with my broken caste. The only difference is that one state is temporary; the other is permanent. Surely my mother has some better accommodation to give me than this.”

The last words were said with a touch of indignation; but they had no more effect in producing a reply than what had gone before. The sweeper finished his work with the broom and was directed to fetch the things set apart for Ananda’s use. A couple of chairs, an old camp table, a cot laced with rope and furnished with coarse bedding. These and a few other trifles were placed in the room by willing but awkward hands. The pariah had had no experience in dealing with bedroom furniture.

Two or three times Ananda addressed himself to his uncle but his remarks were received in stolid silence. His relative might have been deaf. Neither by look nor speech was there any sign of reply. By this time the noon was passed, and although Ananda was too much disturbed in his mind to feel hungry he was conscious of thirst. As his uncle was about to leave after having completed the arrangement of the room, he said—

“It is some time since I had anything to drink. I

am thirsty. Let the waterman bring me a pot of water and a cup."

A few minutes later the sweeper returned bearing an earthen pot of water and a tin mug. He approached the door with manifest reluctance, well aware of the gross insult he was offering. His touch was pollution, unspeakable pollution. Sooner would a caste man allow his drinking vessel to come into contact with a plague-stricken corpse than have it touched by a pariah.

"My lord ! this is not my doing. With heavy blows has this slave been driven here——"

He was not permitted to finish the apology. Furiously angry, Ananda yielded to the instinct implanted by generations of caste ancestors. He rushed at him, knocked the earthen vessel out of his hands and with a blow sent him backwards into the foliage of the gourd. The pot broke and the mug rolled aside.

"How dare a loathsome pariah like this son of a jackal offer me such an insult ! Go ! get out of my sight ! Don't let me see your face again."

The unfortunate sweeper fled ; and the outraged man sank upon a chair. He leaned his arms upon the rickety table and bowed his head. His lips trembled and the fingers of both hands slowly clenched over his palms in his effort to control himself ; for the last act had unnerved and shaken him. What had he done to merit such unnecessary and gratuitous insult ? The caste waterman of the establishment might have brought the water pot and mug. He could have entered the room

without detriment to his own caste. In fact, all the duties recently performed by the sweeper could have been done without any difficulty by the servants of the house, and would have been performed by them if the intentional degradation had not been designed expressly for his humiliation.

Ananda suffered keenly, as much from the unkindness and cruelty shown as from the insult. It could not have happened without the consent of his parents. A feeling of resentment at its injustice roused his indignation, and he lifted his head in angry pride. He would not submit without protest. His anger served as a tonic to his wounded spirit and pricked his courage. The shining eyes hardened and the mouth grew firm.

The day wore on without incident. As no one appeared he determined to seek an interview with his father or mother or some other member of the family, and remonstrate against the outrageous treatment he was receiving.

Memory served him well ; he had forgotten nothing of the geography of the place and he found nothing altered. Walking slowly round to the front of the house he arrived at the stone steps that led up to the verandah. Three or four men were seated on the masonry bench ; they were talking together ; but as soon as they caught sight of him they became silent.

Ananda recognised two of them as relatives and he greeted them by name as he mounted the steps.

“ I wish to see my father,” he said with a new dignity

and authority. "Will one of you go and say that his son awaits him in the verandah."

The request called forth no reply. They stared at him and rose one by one, retiring through the big door which stood open. He was alone, standing on the top step, not daring to enter the house. Too well he knew all that would be involved by such an action. The inner courtyard was exposed to view. His eager eyes searched every corner for a sight of the figure he longed to see. A child toddled out from the women's quarters. The boy's curiosity was roused. With the delightful absence of shyness and self-consciousness peculiar to Indian children the little fellow began to run towards him fearlessly, limping slightly.

It needed no words to tell the eager father who it was. Ananda's heart leaped within him, flooded with a warm wave of paternal love. That beautiful boy with his rounded limbs, his smooth olive skin, his regular features could be none other than his son. Pride, tenderness, joy rose at the thought, and he opened his arms. Swiftly the child approached with growing confidence. Swifter still followed a form that caused Ananda's heart to beat quicker and the blood to race through his veins.

It was his wife. If the boy was beautiful what was she in the first flush of her womanhood? From his lips fell the one word that no other man had a right to call her. "Wife!"

Did she hear him? He felt that she must have caught the word. A pair of startled eyes met his as she snatched

away the child. The great door slammed in his face, and the vision was gone. Was it her hand that struck the cruel blow? Or had some member of the family crept up unseen and swung the door into its socket.

Again the first sensation was a sense of injury and unmerited wrong; but the weakness passed more quickly this time, and it was followed by a just wrath. The family had no right to treat him in this insulting manner, he said to himself indignantly. He was being condemned unheard. They were inhuman as well as unjust. He felt sure that this treatment was not meted out with his parents' consent. It was the work of his uncle, who was too fond of playing the master of the house. He must see his father and have some explanation. When his parents had heard the reason for the step he had taken, they would understand; they would become interested; and when they learned the beautiful doctrines of Christianity regarding the future life, they might possibly incline towards the new faith themselves and find comfort in the hope it taught. In their ignorance of the fundamental teaching of Christianity his parents believed that there was an immeasurable gulf between the two creeds. If they would only listen they would realise that in Christ was to be found the ideal and perfect manifestation of God. His teaching brought hope and comfort and a sure promise of progressive happiness; whereas the creed of the Hindu presented nothing but a stagnant circle of painful rebirths. At best it could only end in loss of personality, which was nothing more nor less than

a hideous spiritual and intellectual death, more horrible to contemplate than the physical death.

Ananda had not been received into the English Church without due instruction. The duties of his adopted faith had been carefully inculcated. He had been warned that if he met with any persecution he would have to bear it in a Christ-like spirit, meekly and with patience.

As he stood before the closed door meekness and patience were conspicuous by their absence. The old Adam boiled within him in the full strength of oriental passion. In furious wrath he beat at the closed door with his walking-stick. He called his father by name, and other male relatives. He tried to wrench open the wooden shutters of the windows ; but door and windows alike resisted his efforts and left him exhausted. No one answered his angry calls and impatient knocks. He listened but could not hear a sound. He was opposed by a colossal silence that did more to crush and subdue the chafing spirit than torrents of abuse.

Tired out, and his wrath partly spent, he gave up the attempt to summon a member of the household and went dejectedly down the steps, turning his back upon the inhospitable door of his old home. He glanced up and down the road. What should he do with himself during the remaining hours of daylight ? To the south-east the town clustered round the old fort. He knew it well with its thronged streets and busy bazaars. To the north-west stood the mountains purpling into rich shades

as the sun approached the horizon. A refreshing breeze blew in from the north. It cooled his heated face and drew him in the direction of the open country with a kindly welcome.

He walked towards the silent hills until the sun and its afterglow had disappeared. Then he retraced his steps, his peace of mind somewhat restored. He became conscious of a healthy appetite and of an insistent thirst for a cup of tea or coffee or a glass of milk.

He regained his room. It was in darkness except for a small oil lamp, too dim to be of any use for reading purposes, that stood upon the camp table. In a corner near the door was another waterpot with a tin mug. He did not know if the mug was the same that the pariah had defiled by his touch ; he preferred to think that the waterman had brought both the pot and the mug, and under this persuasion he took a long drink.

Apparently his return was observed by the household. Ten minutes later the same man, who had swept his room, appeared carrying a tray on which were dishes of curry with chutney and rice. All were of the best and most tempting quality. The mere smell whetted Ananda's appetite till he was well nigh ravenous ; but he turned resolutely away whilst the pariah, not daring to enter the room, set the tray down on the threshold and vanished before Ananda could throw him thanks or abuse. If the truth must be told it was the latter that was on the tip of his tongue ; but something arrested the torrent of curses and made him pause.

He did not attempt to analyse the feeling. The just anger of an injured man was still dominant ; but something from outside, something altogether new was working underneath his caste instincts. He stood at the open door looking out at the starlit night, the much needed food at his feet. A strange sense of detachment, of calm isolation, came over him, bringing an unexpected stilling of the emotional storm ; it was almost peace. The quiet beauty of the night stirred the memory of St. Paul's cathedral. He seemed to hear the wonderful cadences of the organ echoing round him, pouring balm upon the senses and endowing the wounded spirit with strength to rise to better things above the passions of the soul. By the aid of that memory he climbed out of the slough of despair into which he had been plunged ; and a half articulate prayer went up to the living God for pity and help.

The crescent moon following the sun to its setting shone in the luminous grey-green sky. That same moon faintly silvered the big grey dome of St. Paul's where the organ pealed and the choir sang the daily evensong. He calculated the time. It was about the hour for the service to begin. In spirit he was back again kneeling among the quiet worshippers, unnoticed but not despised, repeating the wonderful prayer to " Our Father " that all lips can utter no matter what the creed of the worshipper may be.

How long he remained standing at the door he did not know. The smell of the savoury curry reached his

nostrils, and appealed to a part of his nature that could not be ignored. There was no doubt but that he was desperately hungry ; and the curry was food he had not tasted for some time past. It was one of the pleasures to which he was looking forward on his return home, as the Englishman thinks of the beefsteak. His mother prided herself on the excellence of her chutneys. In the dim light he could see that they had been dealt out with a liberal hand.

Suddenly he remembered who had brought the food. It was the despised pariah. With a shudder he turned away as a European might have turned from carrion. He understood why the food had been prepared so carefully. It was not love but a refined cruelty that had prompted the serving up of such a curry.

He flung himself into a chair and passed his hand over his eyes. The mud walls, unrelieved by whitewash looked black and murky. The tiled roof was open and without a ceiling. A fusty uncleanly scent of bats and squirrels offended him ; and the rough wooden cot with its coarse black blankets was uninviting even to a weary man who longed for repose.

His portmanteaux and suit case remained untouched where he had thrown them ; he had not the heart to unpack and pull out the various little luxuries which from long use in England were a necessity in his daily routine. There was no dressing-table where brushes, combs, collar and stud boxes could lie ; no washstand with spotless towel and pretty crockery to hold his sponge

and soap. If he took off his coat, no wardrobe nor chest of drawers was provided for its reception. It must hang over the back of a chair until it was required again.

The food, hot and steaming when it was brought, grew cold and less inviting. He could not leave it there all night ; it must be moved if only to allow of the door being closed when he slept. Once more he went to the doorway, and this time called softly. Immediately the same man appeared.

“ Excellency ! this slave is here.”

“ Take away the food. It has been defiled by the hand of a sweeper and I cannot eat it.”

The man obeyed without a word. He returned and fell to the ground before Ananda.

“ The great one knows that this is not the doing of this worm. The big mistress commanded it, and this slave could not do otherwise. The master’s brother himself held the stick over my shoulders, and when I protested he let it fall. See, even by the dim light of the lamp how my skin is striped.”

Ananda strode out past him into the night.

“ Follow me ; I have something to say.”

He walked away from the building, keeping, however, within the compound, which was walled in and private. When they were at a sufficient distance to be secure from eavesdropping and observation Ananda spoke.

“ Tell me ! who is it that gives orders ? Is it my father ? ”

“The honourable master gives no orders. He sits silent in the front room without speaking.”

“It is my mother, then ? ”

The pariah wagged his head in assent.

“It is the big mistress aided by the excellency’s brother. He tells her what to say and she repeats his words to one of the kitchen women who delivers the orders to me. I said to the kitchen woman that this was not my work. I am paid to sweep round the house and carry away the refuse. His honour’s brother heard me and came towards me with his stick raised. I was frightened and obeyed.”

“Did you tell them that I broke the waterpot ? ”

The pariah again made a sign in the affirmative.

“What did they say ? ”

“The kitchen woman told me that the small master laughed, and the big mistress said ‘It is well.’ ”

“And his excellency ? How did he receive the news ? ”

“He bowed his head and hid his face in his hands. ‘It is hard on the boy,’ she heard him say, ‘and there is no necessity.’ My lord, I have orders to go to-morrow morning early for the coffee and rice cakes apportioned to your honour. What can I do ? My lord must eat or he will be sick. I am but a slave with no choice but to obey.”

He put his hands together as though he prayed for-giveness. Ananda paused before replying.

“Do as you are told,” he said at last ; and he spoke more gently to the unfortunate outcaste than he had done before. “I can give the food to the crows. They are not troubled with caste scruples,” he added bitterly.

“But the young master must not starve,” said the pariah, with real concern. “My lord must forgive his worthless servant for speaking. This worm has a plan by which the master shall not starve. To-morrow before it is light I will bring a herdsman with his cow and he shall draw the milk and deliver it into your honour’s hand. There are shops in the town where food may be bought in tins. It is well known that people of all castes eat European biscuits in peace without defilement if they open the tins themselves. The master shall buy and open for himself. I will bring charcoal so that the milk may be warmed by your excellency and all will be well.”

“Good ; let it be so,” replied Ananda.

He gave the man no thanks, but there was a softness in his voice that satisfied him. Ananda turned back towards the little room that was to serve as bedroom and sitting-room for the present, a den in which even a dog would have moped and pined. A sound reached his ears causing him to stop. It was a wail of grief such as the women raised on the death of a member of the family. He called to the pariah.

“Who weeps in the house ? ”

“The big mistress and her women.”

“Is any one of the family dead ? ”

“They weep because your excellency is not with them.”

“It is enough ; go.”

It was indeed enough ! At intervals during the night he heard the wail as he lay on his uncomfortable bed. It spoke volumes. He was dead to them from henceforth and worse than dead. He was an outcaste sunk to the lowest depths of degradation, ranked with the “untouchables,” and regarded with loathing as unclean and abominable.

CHAPTER VIII

PANTULU rose the following day as usual and performed his ceremonial ablutions. Later in the morning when the family had dispersed he laid himself down in the shade of the verandah of the inner court. His wife had been watching him with some anxiety. He was too quiet, too wordless to satisfy her. She would have been better pleased if he had broken out into loud cursings and lamentations ; if he had exhibited irritation and temper to the rest of the household. It would have been excusable if he had stormed at herself for some trifle ; or dealt out correction to some of the younger members of the family.

She and her women had obtained relief in the wailing and tears of the previous night. By the small hours of the morning every one was tired out and ready for sleep. They all awoke satisfied that the atmosphere was clearer and their balance of mind restored. Each went her way to perform her duty feeling that there was no need to waste more time in regret.

Ananda's father had taken the misfortune differently. So far he had found no outlet for his grief. Throughout the long absence of his son he had daily and hourly

looked forward to the boy's return. Sometimes he had been assailed by a haunting fear lest something should happen, lest Ananda should die in that distant land as Coomara had done and never come back ; lest he himself should die. Then hope would revive and he would spend his idle hours picturing the home-coming and all its delights. Never in any of his visions did the evil enter that had actually overtaken the family ; and now that it had come he could not face it. It hung about him like a dark shadow the depths of which he dared not fathom.

His wife leaned over him where he lay on a mat against the wall. This feeble surrender to grief was not at all to her mind, and she had no intention of allowing him to take his trouble meekly.

"Husband, you are not well. The kitchen woman shall make you a hot drink that will warm your heart."

"My heart is already too hot ! I have swallowed the red-hot balls that Yama prepares for the cursed after death. I want for nothing but relief from my pain ; and who can give that ? "

"Lying here with a broken spirit will not bring relief. It is a mistake to grieve while there is hope, unless it be for an hour or two as I and my women lamented last night. This morning I rise refreshed and ready to do battle with the evil. The struggle has begun and it has begun well. The boy broke the waterpot, struck the sweeper and commanded him to get out of his sight. He also refused his food last night. It must have tempted

him sorely for I superintended the preparation of it myself ; and I have not forgotten his tastes.”

She sat down by the recumbent figure and passed her long soft hands over his limbs with a soothing touch.

“ My boy went starving to bed ? ”

“ As an ill-behaved son should ! ”

“ He ate very little in the train, saying that he would the better enjoy his mother’s curry. Eiheu ! ” he drew in his breath and breathed it out in a sigh. “ He must have suffered in his hunger ! ”

Gunga’s eyes flashed angrily, the lids closing quickly with an ominous snapping movement.

“ Let him suffer ! His troubles and his hunger have only just begun. They are nothing to what will follow if he remains obstinate,” she said vindictively. “ With your brother’s help we shall bring down his pride in time.”

Pantulu moved his hand as if in protestation. “ Is it necessary ? Can we not try other means first ? ”

The thought of cruelties practised upon his son was unbearable.

“ Get up and speak to him yourself. Perhaps he will listen and then there will be no need for punishment. Point out how he has sinned, not only against us, his parents, but against your dead father, your grandfather and his father. The shraddah ceremonies have been faithfully performed by you. Through your good offices the spirits of your ancestors rest in peace ; but when you

die, who is to perform the rites by which your spirit will find happiness? Your great-great-grandfather will not suffer; your ceremonies have released him; but if your son cannot and will not perform the necessary rites, you and three generations behind you will remain in the power of Yama to be plagued as the god of death wills. What does that mean but rebirths innumerable to a life of suffering and degradation? Is the peace of four departed members of the family to be imperilled because a wilful son refuses to do his duty? He must be forced to abandon his strange opinions. He must be obliged by some means or other to perform the rites for the restitution of his caste; and he must and shall be the chief mourner at the death of his father whenever that may be."

The last words rang out clearly so that they could be heard by the whole household. They carried conviction to every listener. No one doubted that the mother would prevail in the end. Even Pantulu himself with all his weakness born of his intense love for his son admitted that she was right; that at all costs Ananda must be made to renounce his new faith.

If no son were at hand to perform the funeral rites at his cremation and afterwards on the anniversary of his death, he must assuredly be born again as an unhappy beast of burden; or as some loathsome creature whose very existence was misery and against whom every man's hand was turned. As Pantulu continued silent Gunga took up her parable again.

“When the horse is wilful it is beaten; when the bullock is obstinate it is goaded. When a son is disobedient his parents use the means provided by the gods to bring him into subjection. What I have done thus far is nothing! nothing! but before proceeding further I will leave my husband to exercise his authority. Rise! be a man! be a father worthy of the name! Rise and speak to him. Show him clearly all that is involved in his foolish action. Argue with him. Aye! if it pleases you beg of him to consider, to have pity on his father, to have mercy on his mother. If he remains obstinate have him beaten and starved and brought low with pain and hunger——”

“Woman! he is my son! my beloved child! I hurt him once when I struck him in my surprise and anger. I cannot hurt him again!”

The tears welled in the haggard eyes and ran unchecked down the old cheeks. She uttered an exclamation of contemptuous impatience.

“You are weak, too weak to lead a headstrong boy. However, no good can come of lying here. Get up and try what the tongue can do.”

Pantulu raised himself from the mat, shook out the crumpled folds of his muslin garments. His heart ached for his son, and he was conscious of only one desire—to put his arms about his neck and thank the gods that his boy was safe home again. His anger had evaporated in the ebullition with which the announcement was greeted. Already he was secretly repenting that he had

cursed him ; and he would have recalled his maledictions if he could have done so without raising the ire of his wife.

“ Where is he ? ” he asked dispiritedly.

“ He walks at the further end of the compound.”

Pantulu moved away towards the back of the house and passed through the garden. He entered the grassy compound by the doorway in the mud wall that enclosed the garden. At the further end from the road he caught sight of a figure. With his hands behind his back Ananda stood looking at the mountain. His thoughts were in the past when he and his father started out for the forest. By some instinct he turned at the approach of the older man and fixed on him a startled gaze. For the first time he noticed how Pantulu had aged. He stooped as he walked, and dragged his legs listlessly. Ananda strode forward and fell at Pantulu's feet as the pariah had prostrated himself the day before.

“ Excellent and honourable father ! at last my prayer is granted, and I am permitted to see and speak with you.”

“ Rise, my son ; I am sorry you have had to wait. Since my return I have not felt well.”

The watching woman looking through the venetians saw the meeting and the son's obeisance. “ Now, if he will press the boy whilst his heart melts within him, he may bring him to reason,” she said to herself. She called to her brother-in-law. “ See ! my husband brings his son to the house. They will come into the

verandah. Quick ! hide beneath the window that is behind the bench where he usually sits. Listen to all that is said and bear it in mind. I must know every word that passes between them."

As Pantulu and Ananda moved towards the house the former asked if the other had breakfasted.

"I had some biscuits," replied Ananda. He thought it wiser not to mention the milk lest he should get the pariah into trouble and stop the supply. "I cannot eat food sent by the hand of the sweeper."

"It is impossible !" murmured Pantulu with a shudder. "Ah ! I am glad that my boy has not been obliged to defile himself in that way. For drink, what have you done ? Have you found means to satisfy your thirst without defilement ?"

"That also I have accomplished."

"Your mother must not know."

"It is by my mother's orders that I am thus treated ?"

"It is done by the consent of the whole family, not by the mother alone," said Pantulu, unwilling to hurt Ananda's feelings.

"You are ruler in your own house, excellency. Order one of the women servants to attend upon me. It hurts the caste of no one to carry food to the outcaste."

"Inside the house your mother rules, as is the custom among families like ours. I cannot interfere ; but I can speak to her and ask her to give the order. If I can take good news she may listen."

“Good news; what does that mean?” asked Ananda.

“That you will give up your strange madness and allow the caste restoration ceremonies to take place.”

Ananda did not reply. His father's eyes searched his face with undisguised anxiety for sign of a favourable response. He only saw a tightening of the lower lip and slight protruding of the jaw with an unconscious toss of the head. He remembered the trick of old and all that it implied. The deep underlying obstinacy that had ever been the one fault of the boy was still there ready to uphold new beliefs, prematurely formed in his father's opinion and without sufficient consideration. His heart sank within him and he was silent during the rest of the way.

They arrived at the house and mounted the steps that led up to the front door. The door was closed and the verandah was empty. Pantulu took his seat upon a broad bench and drew his feet up beneath him. It was as Gunga had said, just under a window. He signed to his son to sit on the same bench by his side.

“No harm will have been done by your having called yourself a Christian in a foreign land,” continued Pantulu, resolutely looking away from his companion's face, that he might not be discouraged by what was so manifest there. “The ceremonies will be of a character to restore you even if you have sinned greatly. I have money enough to satisfy the purohits. There are worse

offences than the one you have committed. You have not killed a Brahman, for instance."

"I told you, oh excellent father, that having taken this step there is no going back," said Ananda, at last, in a low voice.

"I say there is ; there must be a going back. Your deeds can be undone, expiated. Listen !" Pantulu controlled his excitement and continued more quietly. "Listen, my son. Let me put before you all that it means if you refuse to come back to us. Who is to perform the funeral rites at my death if you cannot be chief mourner ? Are they to be left unperformed ? Is my spirit to wander as a wretched ghost and be born again as an unhappy contemptible pariah or beast because my son refuses to fulfil his duties ? "

"You will never be born again on this earth, my father ; you will never become a man or a beast again," cried Ananda, his eyes aglow with enthusiasm. "The man-God of the Christians came to open men's eyes to better things, to assure the world of immediate pardon for sin, and to promise a happiness after death far exceeding any earthly happiness. Think what a glorious future He offers to us in place of the hopeless cycles of rebirths."

Pantulu shook his head in perplexity, not without fear at the blasphemy against Hinduism that fell upon his startled ears.

"Our faith was ancient before ever the man-God of the Christians was born. Were the millions, who lived and died before His time, living and dying in error ? "

“ They lived and died according to the light given to them by God. When Christ was born, a new light came into the world. It is by following the new light that I have found my hope in a glorious future, an existence of joy and happiness surpassing even the Nirvana itself ; for we shall retain our personality and consciousness which is denied to those who look for absorption in the Hindu Deity. Try and realise the joy that you and I, my beloved father, will feel when we meet in that golden future. At Coomara’s death I was in despair. Every time I heard a dog shriek or saw a horse overloaded and beaten, I thought of my friend suffering similar pains ; and all for no fault of his ! It was intolerable in its injustice ; I could not bear it. Then I met the family of an Englishman who was killed suddenly ; and I wondered at their peace, their resignation, their perfect faith in his happiness and their belief in a future meeting. When I found that the secret lay in their religion what could I conclude but that their religion must be better and more advanced than mine ? ”

Pantulu had listened unwillingly at first and with prejudice ; gradually his curiosity was aroused ; he wanted to learn what it was that had attracted Ananda and taken so strong a hold upon him. Moreover the charm of hearing his son’s voice once more exercised a kind of hypnotic influence, causing him almost to forget the vital issues of their conversation and their variance of opinion. There was comfort also in proximity. The poor old man found delight in the mere

touch of his boy's hand. Nothing could kill the paternal love that had filled Pantulu's life.

In the distance he heard his wife speaking sharply to one of her women in the kitchen. The sound made him start guiltily. What had he been doing? Listening to rank heresy instead of preaching orthodoxy. He pulled himself together with an effort.

"My son, the Christian faith may be all very well for Christians. We are Hindus, born, by a fate over which we have no control, in the Hindu faith. The faith is bound up with our social and political laws and cannot be separated. Let me point out to you how important it is that you should make no change. If by remaining an outcaste you cannot fulfil the part of chief mourner at my death, the law of caste—and it is upheld by our country's law—disinherits you. You cannot inherit any of my wealth, my lands, my houses, my looms, my silk farms, my jewels and hoard of silver. Not a single rupee will be yours if another hand drops the rice and butter into the fire before my dead body immediately after death; if another bears the pot of fire in my funeral procession; if another lights the funeral pile. Would you wish to lose your birthright, the riches that should be yours, the honour as head of one of the oldest and most respected families of Chirakul? Would you deliberately make yourself a pauper, an outcaste, despised even by the pariahs? Consider well all that you propose to sacrifice."

Once more Pantulu gazed anxiously into his boy's

face for a sign that he relented, that his pleading had prevailed ; and his heart sank within him as he noted the tightening of the lower lip and the obstinate tilt of the chin. Again he spoke, repeating the old arguments, enumerating the property that should one day belong to his son ; but without avail. At length Ananda made a kind of response in putting a question.

“ If I do not take upon myself the duties of chief mourner, on whom do they fall ? ” he asked.

“ On your son.”

“ And the child will inherit your fortune ? ”

“ Everything ; and as soon as he comes of age he will take my place in the family councils and you will be as one that has died in a foreign land.”

Ananda rose to his feet intimating that as far as he was concerned the interview was at an end.

“ Your answer, my son ! your answer ! what news am I to carry to your mother ? ” cried Pantulu, in sudden dismay, as he realised two facts—his son was leaving him, and he had failed miserably in his attempt to win him back.

“ I have nothing to say that has not been already said.” Ananda spoke with evident pain. It grieved him to wound his father by refusing to comply with his wishes. He knew of what vital importance it was to a Hindu to have the assurance that the funeral rites would be duly performed by a fitting and proper member of the family ; and he found the greatest difficulty in maintaining his honesty of speech. The temptation to

temporise was strong. "It is impossible, even if I desired it, to re-establish my faith in the Hindu teaching concerning the future life. It is a miserable groping in the dark, a wilful blinding of the eyes; the whole thing is a relic of the ancestor worship of a barbarous people not worthy of our nation with its present civilisation. I must have something better——"

"My son! my son!" interrupted his father in an agony of disappointment and grief. "It is killing me! Have mercy on me! My life is bound up in yours! I cannot live without you! Keep your beliefs secretly if you will, but I beg, I pray you conform outwardly to the faith of your ancestors. In their names I command you to come back and do your duty——"

The door of the house opened and Gunga came out confronting her son for the first time since his return. Ananda put the palms of his hands together and repeated his greeting mechanically.

"May the gods protect you, most excellent and beloved mother!"

She received the salutations with an exclamation of contempt.

"Call me not mother! Unhappy woman that I am to have given birth to such a breaker of our most sacred laws. Go! get out of the house which you have dishonoured! See!" she pointed to Pantulu, who had drooped where he sat till he seemed to crouch in abject misery. "See how he is stricken! It is the hand of a wicked son who has dealt the blow. May that hand be

accursed ! May its owner be condemned to cycles of wretched rebirths ! ”

She poured out a string of curses upon him and he fled. Obstinate yet strangely craven, he clung desperately to the new faith which alone held out a promise of salvation from the awful fate invoked by his mother. Her very maledictions drove him to his new leader Christ. His father's entreaties only placed before him anew the tenets that had filled him with such horror. Already he had had experience of the persecution he was likely to meet with if he persisted in his adherence to Christianity. He shrank from physical pain with the timidity of a child ; but for all that he preferred to face the ills of this life to the terrors of the Hindu life to come.

With his heart thumping like a hammer he regained his room and sat down to collect the thoughts scattered by the sudden and unexpected onslaught made by his mother. His spirit rose in a wordless prayer ; it seemed to steep itself in the new light, and again he was sensible of a blessed peace that soothed and calmed his disordered mind. His courage returned, and he deliberately set himself to recall his father's words. What was it that he had said about disinheritance ? He must have made a mistake. The solution of the difficulty would be found in the making of a will. His father must have a proper will drawn up by which his son was named as his heir. He must have another interview. On second thoughts perhaps it would be better to write his request.

Taking out his writing case he set to work at once. The time slipped by without his knowledge. He looked at his watch ; it was three o'clock. The sweeper did not appear and no food was sent. The omission did not trouble him. Again he satisfied his hunger with biscuits and tried to forget his thirst.

The sun set and the tropical night approached. He listened for the step of the despised pariah, but the man did not come to perform any of his duties. The excitement of the journey and return home had worn off, and Ananda was conscious of an oppressive dullness. He lighted the dim oil lamp and a little later lay down on his cot.

He was in a sound sleep when he was awakened by the falling of some little stones near the cot. A whisper reached his ears.

“ Excellency ! the cow is here. Come for your milk.”

Ananda rose at once and crept out of his room in silence. He followed the pariah to the wall that divided the compound from the road. A herdsman of his own caste handed him a bottle of milk over the wall, just drawn from the cow for which he paid him the current price with a small sum in addition for his trouble in bringing the cow at such an hour. The man went away immediately.

“ Excellency, no food was sent to-day by my hand,” said the sweeper. “ It did not matter since your honour could not eat it ; but the meaning of such treatment must be understood. The big mistress hopes to

starve your excellency into obedience. This she can only do when there is no more money left in your honour's moneybag. Be careful of your rupees. I can bring the cow but I cannot bring rupees and the cow will not come without the rupees."

The man mounted the wall with the intention of returning to his home.

"Why did you not come to-day to sweep the yard?" asked Ananda.

"I was forbidden by the big mistress. The order has been given that no one is to speak with your honour or approach your room. To-morrow night I will come and bring the herdsman with his cow."

The following morning Ananda wrote another letter which he posted himself in the town. It was addressed to Dr. Wenaston, Principal of the College of Chirapore; and the long epistle he had prepared for his father remained in his writing case undelivered.

CHAPTER IX

A soft, balmy air brushed the blossoms of the eucharis lilies, and swept over the delicate green maidenhair fern growing under the shade of the verandah of the Principal's house. Out in the broad sunshine the blue ipomea, the morning glory of the Indian garden, opened its mass of azure blooms and spread a gorgeous mantle over the bamboo trellis that supported it.

The plump rounded figure of Mrs. Hulver, Dr. Wenaston's housekeeper, appeared on the raised verandah, followed by the butler. She was a widow and had been married three times, a fact that no one of her acquaintance was permitted to forget.

Her father was a British soldier of Scotch birth ; and her mother a Eurasian. In her youth Maria had some pretensions to good looks. It was the prettiness of youth so often seen where the blood of the east and the west is mixed. Her small regular features and olive complexion could make no claim to beauty in her mature middle age, when her figure had lost its delicate proportions and gained in amplitude. The eyes alone were unaltered. She had her Scotch father's grey eyes with his keen glance. Nothing escaped them, as the servants

knew by experience ; and when they failed to elucidate a domestic mystery her inherited shrewdness came to her assistance.

At the age of sixteen a marriage was made for her by her mother, who chose a prosperous and not over-scrupulous overseer in the Public Works Department named William Delaine. He was more than double the age of his bride ; and had lived long enough to put together a nice little property in houses and land. There were no children, and when he died ten years later he left everything to his widow.

Her second marriage was to an Englishman, whose regiment was stationed at Bangalore. Corporal William Smith was a reserved man of a thoroughly British temperament, endowed with a rugged honesty that despised any sort of evasion of the truth in speech or action. Uncompromisingly straightforward he did much to carry on the early training of Maria's mind begun by her father. She was very happy with William Smith in a placid way, and bore him a son who was educated in the barrack-school and in due time drafted into the drummer-boy corps attached to the regiment. Later the boy enlisted and followed in the footsteps of his father. William Smith was about to take his pension and return to England when he was struck down with malarial fever ; and for the second time in her life Maria became a widow.

Her third husband was an Irish soldier who had been pensioned and elected to remain in the country. He also

bore the name of William. Being of a good-natured domesticated disposition, Hulver cast his eyes round the large domiciled European and Eurasian community in Bangalore for a suitable wife. Mrs. William Smith seemed in every way the woman to fill the position. She was of the right age, unencumbered by children except for the one son who was provided for. In addition she owned a nice little property which, with his pension, would make life easy and comfortable.

A little hitch at one time seemed likely to upset his plans. It was a matter of religion. Hulver was a Roman Catholic. Maria belonged to the English Church. He made an effort to bring her over to his side, but she stood firm; and sooner than lose so desirable a partner he joined her Church. They were very happy, but unfortunately he did not live long, and for the third time she was widowed. After his death she found life very dull. She determined to take a situation as housekeeper and advertised in one of the big Indian daily newspapers.

Eola Wenaston, who came out with her brother on his appointment as Principal of the College of Chirapore, saw the advertisement and engaged her. The arrangement proved highly satisfactory to both. During Dr. and Miss Wenaston's six months' holiday in England Mrs. Hulver occupied one of her own houses at Bangalore. The enforced idleness was not at all to her mind, and she welcomed their return with unmixed joy.

In her holiday she replenished her wardrobe by the aid of a tailor. The new muslins and white drill frocks

were cut exactly on the old pattern—a skirt that gave plenty of room and spread like a bell over her feet ; a bodice that showed no fashionable bulge in sleeve or shoulder but confined her figure decently and comfortably. White linen collar and cuffs and neatly fastened waist-band completed her daily costume. On Sunday Mrs. Hulver was another person. Her silks “ stood alone,” as she herself expressed it ; and the flowers of her bonnet would have covered half a market stall had they been real.

Mrs. Hulver stood on the top step under the large portico, her clean white skirt extended with starch, her hands folded and a severe expression on her face. Ramachetty, the butler, a middle-aged under-sized native with an apologetic manner, fidgeted behind her in evident discomfort. She addressed him in English over her shoulder. The native tongue was perfectly familiar ; it had been her own in her mother’s house ; but she chose English as being more in keeping with her dignity as a housekeeper and it assisted to maintain her character as an Englishwoman, which she was not.

“ Call the gardener,” she said, with a clear enunciation and very little Eurasian accent. From her father and two of her husbands she had picked up a curious mixture of expressions.

Probably the summons was expected ; for the gardener appeared from behind the bungalow with the abruptness of a jack-in-the-box.

“ Tell him to bring the pots of roses here.”

Out came a fat forefinger that pointed to the spot and remained pointing. Ignoring the fact that the gardener understood English the butler translated the order into the language of the country. The man hurried away, and by the aid of an assistant brought twelve large pots of roses. They were solemnly placed in a row under the portico on the spot to which the finger pointed. Seven of the plants bore double pink blossoms. The remaining five had crimson flowers of the kind known as the China rose, a stock upon which the Indian gardener buds the better class of plant. There was an ominous silence during which Mrs. Hulver looked from the roses to the gardener and back again at the roses. Then she spoke.

“Two years ago our missie bought twelve pink *France* roses with a sweet smell. How is it that five of them have turned red and lost their smell.”

The gardener chattered fast in his own tongue. He explained that during the absence in England of the master and the missie there had been strange kind of weather. The weather had poisoned the flowers and made them turn colour and lose their scent. This preposterous statement was too much for Mrs. Hulver’s dignified patience. She abandoned her high-class English and let herself go in the native tongue.

How dared he tell her such a tale ! Whoever heard of the weather changing the colour of flowers ? Was it the rain or the sun ? It was neither ; the mischief was done in the night, stoutly maintained the gardener.

Then, as she kept an incredulous silence, he asked querulously, if it was any stranger than that carriages should run along the road without horses, and messages be sent without messengers. Were the English to be the only wonder-workers? Could not the gods of India——? She cut him short. While he chattered she had framed her line of conduct.

“There is no wonder about the business except that the master keeps such a budmash on the premises. If the plants had been properly watered and tended in the master’s absence, the weather would not have affected them. It is only neglected plants that are affected by bad weather.” She paused to allow her grey eye to rest upon him; and he shifted uneasily from one foot to the other under her scrutiny. “Do you hear, gardener? They must be nursed back to their proper condition. There will be a fine of one rupee for each pot. As soon as they recover, the fine will be returned; but until the twelve roses bear proper double pink flowers with full, good smell the money will be stopped out of your pay. Each pay-day before giving the wages I shall come and look at the roses.”

The fat finger was withdrawn. Mrs. Hulver turned slowly round and sailed back into the bungalow.

“What were you scolding the gardener for?” asked Eola, after she left the breakfast-room and sought the house-keeper to consult with her on the day’s menu.

“I had to talk to him, miss. He has been misbehaving himself while I have been away. Five of those

France roses that you are so fond of are missing, and China plants put in their places."

"My beautiful *La France* roses gone!" cried Eola, with regret. "I suppose he let them die by neglecting to water and has put others in the pots thinking we should not discover the loss."

"Not he! the spalpeen! He has changed them—sold the good ones and stolen some common plants to fill up with."

"What did he say for himself when you accused him of it?"

"That's just what I didn't do miss; I took care not to make any accusation. As William—that was my second—used to say, 'Think all you like but keep your thoughts to yourself if you want to get even with a bad man.' I kept my thoughts to myself; and when the gardener had the impudence to tell me that the weather had turned the roses from pink to red, I said that if he didn't nurse them back to their right colour you would fine him. They will all return," she continued confidently; "You will have your dozen favourites in a few weeks' time."

Eola was accustomed to Mrs. Hulver's methods of ruling the establishment, and knew better than to interfere, although she did not approve of mulcting her servants of their pay.

"Supposing he has sold them; what will you do then?"

"He'll steal them back or buy them back for a small

sum. 'Trust him for finding out a way to save himself from a big fine such as we shall insist on ! As William—that was my first—used to say (he was country-born and knew the native) : ' Give them a chance of straightening things, and they'll do it as soon as they know that you've found them out ; and they will respect you all the more for obliging them to be honest.' ”

“ If the gardener is dishonest perhaps it would be better to dismiss him and get another.”

“ Gardeners in these parts go with the houses ; and like husbands you've got to put up with them. Besides, it is my experience that you may change and change, whether it's a servant or a husband, and find yourself no better off and no worse off in the end, provided you don't have extraordinary bad luck. They're as like in their separate ways, both servants and husbands, as the cocoanut trees. The only difference you can see in the cocoanut trees is the way they stand. One will lean to one side and another to the other side, and no two will lean just alike. As William—that was my third—he was born in Ireland) used to say : ' Maria, me dear ! God made us men as we are ; and if it weren't for the trials that we bring ye, ye'd just grow yer wings and fly away ; and then, bedad ! where should we poor men be widout ye ? ' He had a nice pleasant way with him, but it was balanced by his fondness for drink ; for *that* was the way he leaned.”

Eola brought the conversation back to the business of the morning and began to discuss the lunch and

dinner. Ramachetty and the cook were called, and the orders for the day given. She sat down at her writing table and entered the daily marketing account in the book kept for that purpose. The butler stood at her elbow on the right and Mrs. Hulver took up her position on the left. There was never any deviation from this little domestic ritual.

The butler proceeded with his list of purchases ; firewood, ghee, soup-meat, mutton, potatoes, fish, eggs, naming the price of each. Once Mrs. Hulver coughed, and he corrected himself, taking off half an anna. At another item she moved from one foot to the other, but remained silent. He paused, and as the warning note of the cough was not sounded, he passed on to the next entry, letting the overcharge, which was very small, stand.

“ Carrots, two annas,” he continued.

“ Carrots ! ” ejaculated Mrs. Hulver sharply.

“ Carrots, two annas,” repeated the butler, sticking manfully to his story.

“ Fetch them ! ”

The cook who was waiting behind the butler ran off to the kitchen and returned with four limp dry roots which he exhibited with many misgivings.

“ Six-day-old carrots,” commented Mrs. Hulver, with fine scorn. “ They were entered in the account last Friday. Cross off ‘ carrots, two annas,’ please, miss.”

The butler accepted the correction without another

word, and proceeded to the end of his list. Eola would willingly have dispensed with some of the details, but Mrs. Hulver was inexorable.

“It must be done, miss,” she had said in reply. “As long as you can hold a pen you must take down the daily account. If by any chance you were ill then I should be obliged to do it; but Ramachetty and I shall remain better friends if I have nothing to do with the book-keeping.”

“You have something to do with it, Mrs. Hulver. You check his attempts at cheating.”

“I keep them down to reasonable proportions. As William—that was my second (he was a very straight-minded man)—used to say: ‘Keep others honest and they’ll keep you up to the mark.’”

When the accounts were finished and the butler and cook dismissed, Eola turned to her housekeeper.

“Mrs. Hulver!” she said.

“Yes, miss.”

There was a slight pause, during which Eola turned back again to the writing-table. The pen was still in her hand and wet with ink. In absence of mind she dotted the margin of the account book, her thoughts far away.

“Yes, miss,” repeated Mrs. Hulver, whose grey eyes searched Eola’s face.

“Ah! yes! What was I going to say? Oh! I know. I wanted to tell you that we have a visitor coming.”

Mrs. Hulver was not so easily deceived. Miss Wenaston had not forgotten the subject of her communication, and the news she was about to impart was no news to her housekeeper.

“Who is it?” asked Mrs. Hulver, innocently.

“Dr. Wenaston has invited Mr. Alderbury to come and stay here a few days. He has business in Chirapore. Will you see to the spare room. I brought out new curtains and chintz to re-cover the sofa and chairs. Set the dirzee to work at once.”

“It shall be begun this very day. I was only thinking about it yesterday afternoon when I came in from the town. It’s more than a month since you came back, miss; and those curtains have been lying by ever since you unpacked them. As William—that was my first—used to say (he was a great man for show, being a Eurasian and a good deal darker than me): ‘When you’ve got fine feathers, don’t hide them.’ What brought the spare room to my mind was Mr. Alderbury’s name. I heard that it would be likely that he would be coming to Chirapore before long.”

“Did you?” asked Eola, looking round at her housekeeper in surprise. “I suppose you heard it in the bazaar. I don’t know how these things get about, but in this country nothing is sacred from bazaar gossip. What do they say?”

“The business of the Reverend Mr. Alderbury is connected with Ananda, the son of Pantulu Iyer, a rich native of this town. Perhaps you know the story. If

so, I'd better be going as there is lots to be done this morning, and the dirzee is never in the way when he is wanted."

Mrs. Hulver spoke with an injured tone and a misjudged expression on her smooth round olive face. She was an inveterate gossip, and her visits to the shops and market were prompted as much by curiosity to hear the news as to verify the butler's charges. Nothing hurt her more than to imply a knowledge of this weakness.

She had a little sitting-room that opened into the back verandah. The door was seldom shut in the daytime. From a point of vantage in the doorway she superintended the tailor, and kept an eye on all that went on in the back verandah. She made as though she would seek her room with as little delay as possible. Eola, repentant that she had hurt her feelings by remarks about the bazaar gossip, softened in her manner and begged to hear the news.

"Do tell me, Mrs. Hulver, what they say. I have not heard anything except that Mr. Alderbury is coming by the Doctor's invitation. My brother only spoke of his visit this morning when he received Mr. Alderbury's reply to the invitation. The Principal was late in getting home from his ride, and had to hurry over breakfast to be in College in time."

The housekeeper was mollified and the dirzee forgotten in her eagerness to relate the news that was already thrilling the town.

"The story goes in the bazaar that Pantulu's son

has turned Christian, and the whole family is in a great taking about it. They don't know what to do."

"Is that all? There is nothing much in that. Of course it is a good thing when a native becomes a Christian; but in these days it is not a matter to make a fuss about."

Mrs. Hulver regarded her seriously. She had expected to create something of a sensation by the announcement, but Eola took it as a trifle hardly worth mention.

"Begging your pardon, miss, there is a great deal in it to create a fuss; and what is more the whole town is working itself up into a ferment over it. They say that they have never had a caste man go Christian before. The Christians have always been pariahs and they have no caste to matter. As William—that was my third—used to say: 'Change your clothes; change your food; change your house if you like; but to change your religion is the very divil;' and he knew; for he'd been a Roman Catholic and he turned Protestant to marry me."

"How did you manage to persuade him?" asked Eola, her mind once more adrift.

Mrs. Hulver was always ready to talk incidentally of her late spouses. At the same time she never lost sight of the subject that caused the digression.

"He wanted me to change my religion; but I was firm. I told him that if he couldn't take me as I was he might go without me. I could get on without him. Besides it was only right that he should be the one to

change, being the gentleman ; it is the gentleman that ought to give way to the lady all the world over."

" And he fell in with your suggestion ? "

" It was the bit of property that did it, though he didn't admit it," replied Mrs. Hulver confidently, the shrewdness of her Scotch ancestry peeping out. " He was drawn to me by two strings, myself for one, and my little fortune for the other. As William—that was my first, him that left me the property—used to say : ' It's money that gives you the pull when the balance is even.' But as I was telling you ; this son of Pantulu Iyer has gone and changed his religion and stirred up a bees' nest of buzzing in the town."

" Was it Mr. Alderbury's doing ? "

" No ; he had nothing to say in the matter ; it was all done without his knowledge. Pantulu sent his son to England to finish his education ; and while he was there, so the tale goes, he saw a very bad accident. One of these elevators, these flying men," she explained, as she noted a puzzled expression on Eola's face, " fell at his very feet and struck down his friend, a native gentleman who was walking with him." Already the story had gathered fiction in its passage from mouth to mouth. " The elevator was killed on the spot ; but the friend had time to make a last request, and it was that Ananda should become a Christian. He never said a word to his people, but got it done on the quiet and registered and everything. It gave his father a terrible shock ; it nearly killed the poor old gentleman when his son came

back and told him what had happened. He is a very rich man and would give a crore of rupees to have the mischief undone. But as William—that was my second—used to say: ‘Mind your doing, because as a rule there’s no undoing.’ In this case there can’t be any undoing. Once a Christian always a Christian, unless you want to burn.”

“I remember Ananda and his friends in London,” said Eola, “I was at that very meeting and saw the man fall. Coomara was not killed by the aviator, but in a railway accident as he was returning to town.”

“Anyway he was killed,” replied Mrs. Hulver. “His death affected his friend and made him feel so bad that he turned Christian. The poor young man is having a very rough time with his people. They are determined to knock the Christianity out of him; and it will be a pretty stiff fight if he has any spirit. It is said in the bazaar that Mr. Alderbury is coming in from the district to see if he can smooth matters down a bit. As William—that was my third—used to say: ‘Let’s have peace if it’s possible; but if it must be war, let’s fight to the finish! and make it a good one!’”

“He didn’t practice what he preached; he gave in,” remarked Eola, unable to resist poking fun at her devoted housekeeper.

Mrs. Hulver smiled broadly, and was quite ready with her answer.

“You see, miss, there was the lady in the case, meaning me. I can’t deny but what William, my third,

found the change of religion troublesome. It meant new habits and a new grip of the thing. He was never satisfied, and always had the feeling that he had played the turncoat. The trouble was at Christmas time when his weakness overtook him. His leaning was towards whisky, being an Irishman. It was expensive whilst it lasted. As William—that was my second—used to say (he was a teetotaller): ‘One vice will cost more than twenty virtues.’ In his old religion my third used to go to his priest when the fit was over, and get square with himself by a proper penance; but when he changed he didn’t quite know where he was with himself.”

“You should have made him give it up altogether,” suggested Eola.

“It was born and bred in him, and he couldn’t have given it up to save his life. As William—that was my first—used to say when I complained of his Eurasian ways: ‘You mustn’t expect a wild goose to lay a tame egg.’ William my third could no more help being weak at Christmas than a child can help over-eating itself.”

“Didn’t it worry you to have him break out?”

“No, I don’t know that it did,” replied Mrs. Hulver, placidly. “It had its advantage. As William—that was my first—used to say when he and his contractor settled their accounts: ‘Everything has its advantage if you know where to look for it.’”

“What advantage could your husband’s bout of drinking have for you?” asked Eola, glancing at her in mild wonder.

“It gave me my chance of speaking. When he recovered and could listen to reason, even though his poor head ached badly, I had the opportunity of letting him have a bit of my mind, and of telling him some home truths I never could have put before him at any other time. Now with William, my second, it was different. He was always ready to come up to attention at a moment’s notice. Stiff and straight, he lived by rule ; and the whole time I was with him I never once got the chance of emptying my mind.” Her voice had a distinct ring of regret in it as she made the confession. “I tried it two or three times ; but the moment I began he rose from his chair and drew himself up haughty and proud, just like his colonel when the men came to the orderly room with their complaints. He heard what I had to say in a dead silence, that sort of cooled you down, and all he replied was : ‘I’ll look into the matter, Maria, and see what can be done ;’ and there it ended. With William, my third, it was a real pleasure to rate him. He was such a gentleman in his repentance and his apologies. But as I was telling you, miss, about this poor young man, Pantulu Iyer’s son. I can sympathise with him in his change of religion as I sympathised with William, my third. It will take some time before he will get even with himself in his new faith.”

“The cases are not on all fours, Mrs. Hulver.”

“No ; they are at sixes and sevens if all I hear is true. As William—that was my second—used to say : ‘Keep things straight and you’ll be master ; but let

them get at sixes and sevens and they will master you.' He made a great study of his fellowmen and was full of wise sayings. I felt very lonely when he died."

"What did he die of?"

"Microscopes; the doctor said he swallowed some when he was out route" (she called it rowte) "marching. They were in the water that he drank by the roadside. They gave him fever which carried him off in three weeks, and left me a widow for the second time."

CHAPTER X

THERE was one subject alone on which Miss Wenaston and her housekeeper disagreed. It had nothing to do with the management of the house. It was marriage.

MRS. Hulver having entered the bonds of matrimony three times considered that she was entitled to speak with authority on the condition of wifehood and widowhood.

EOLA Wenaston was twenty-seven years of age and unmarried. When MRS. Hulver had reached that number of years she had been a wife for a decade, and had entered upon her first period of widowhood. Although a British father had done much to form her character, her Eurasian mother had instilled certain opinions to which she firmly adhered. One fixed belief, as strong as any article of her faith, was that every woman ought to be married. It was the duty of relatives and guardians to forward that end ; it was even still more the duty of the woman herself to attract and secure the best husband available without immodesty.

MISS Wenaston she found sadly wanting in self-help. DR. Wenaston, her brother, was a very busy and sometimes overworked man. He did his best in MRS. Hulver's

opinion when he invited men to his house. His efforts, conscious or unconscious—Mrs. Hulver was not sure which—were not supported as they should have been by his sister. She made no attempt to attract in dress or manner. She was content to wear the same dinner-dress that served when she and her brother were alone ; and she did not hesitate to allow Dr. Wenaston to absorb all the conversation if he chose, remaining silent through the dinner and perhaps through the whole evening as well. This was altogether a mistake, as Mrs. Hulver tried in vain to point out more than once. Eola listened in perfect good nature, but her replies were not encouraging, and the housekeeper was vaguely conscious that she was being kept in her place. She persevered however, and never lost an opportunity of putting in a word as far as she dared ; but she always felt that there was a barrier that she might not pass.

A certain Major Ellingham appeared at Chirapore on his way to a shooting expedition in the Western Ghats. He was entertained by Dr. Wenaston for a week while the camping preparations were made. Mrs. Hulver devoted her attention to the catering ; and with the assistance of Ramachetty and the cook sent in such meals as elicited the guest's warm approval. In the evening as she sat in her wicker-chair by the open door of her sitting-room, she smiled as she heard the strains of the piano, and Ellingham's fine baritone in "Love's old sweet song," or some such melody.

Nothing came of it, however ; and the guest departed

as heart-whole as he left Eola herself. Mrs. Hulver's even temperament was ruffled by a wave of annoyance as she thought of the enhanced bazaar account and all the trouble she had been put to in devising dainty cooking. One morning she ventured to suggest to Miss Wenaston that Major Ellingham would make a good husband. Eola agreed readily enough.

"Probably he will pick up some nice girl by and by, when his head is less full of shooting big game," she said indifferently.

"He is not the man to care for a young girl, miss. I take it from his appearance and general bearing that when he makes his choice, it will fall on a lady with some experience of the world, like yourself and about your own age."

Eola laughed outright and Mrs. Hulver was hurt. A joke she could understand, but ridicule was like a red hot iron, and she shrank into herself. Eola saw that her mirth gave offence, and she hastened to soothe and make amends.

"You need have no fear, Mrs. Hulver. He doesn't take my fancy, nor do I take his ; so there is no likelihood of your losing me."

"It's not that, miss, which troubles me," the house-keeper explained. "Gladly would I see you go as I went myself to the arms of a husband. It's the proper place for every right-minded woman. As William——"

Eola interrupted her with another laugh that she found impossible to repress.

“ You and I don’t agree on the subject of marriage and never shall. I am single and you were very much married—— ”

Mrs. Hulver bridled and broke in upon her speech with some indignation.

“ Indeed, miss ! I was no more married than I ought to have been. To have been less married with my three husbands wouldn’t have been respectable. And I am sure it has helped me along ; I should have been a poor thing without it. As William—that was my second—used to say : ‘ Humble wedlock is better than proud singleness. Marriage is like a good pair of boots to a woman. It will carry her through fair weather and foul. If the boots wear out before their time the best thing to do is to get another pair.’ He talked like that when I was hesitating about taking him. It was not the man himself that made me doubt but the way he leaned. It was all towards truth and honesty.”

“ You are truthful and honest, Mrs. Hulver,” protested Eola. “ Don’t say you are not or you won’t be doing yourself justice.”

“ I have always shrunk from lies and thieving,” admitted Mrs. Hulver. “ I never could stoop to low conduct of any kind. But there is truth and truth. As William—that was my third—used to say when I gave him a talking to : ‘ Lay it on mild, me dear. Truth is like a mustard plaster. It may be very good for the patient but you’ve got to be careful how you apply it or you may hurt your best friend more than a little.’ ”

What troubled me was whether I could live up to the standard of my second."

"You might have been happier if you had not married him," said Eola, with a twinkle in her eye, as she controlled her lips.

"I couldn't have been happy alone with nothing to live up to and no one to tend. I chanced it and found it quite easy. All I had to be careful about was to prevent anything from coming to his knowledge that was not up to his mark. I soon got used to keeping things smooth; and there was never a married man happier than my second."

The thought of her success as William the second's wife restored her tranquillity of mind, and she left Eola to go about her duties in her usual contented frame of mind.

An Assistant Resident was the next person who all unconsciously fluttered Mrs. Hulver's hopes, raising them with regard to Eola only to dash them to the ground again. It so happened that a man came to act for six months whilst the permanent Assistant Resident was away on leave. He was unmarried, musical, and a great reader. Inclination and compatability of tastes often brought him to the college either to discuss new writers with Dr. Wenaston, or to try over new music with Eola.

Once more Mrs. Hulver concentrated her attention and energy on culinary matters. She had not been the chosen partner of three husbands without discovering how great a factor the food question is in the life of a

man. She was able to quote from the sayings of all three on the subject. The Assistant Resident ate such dinners at the college house as he never forgot; but the way to his heart in his case was not through the stomach. Over the music and books he made a certain amount of progress; and had he seen any response to encourage him, he might have fallen into the belief that Eola was the one desirable woman in the world for him; but there was no such encouragement. At the end of six months he went away; and it was Mrs. Hulver's heart, not Eola's, that sank in despair.

"Mr. Fressenden will miss you and the Doctor, miss," remarked Mrs. Hulver, austere, the morning after his departure. "You have been very hospitable to him."

"I daresay he will," was the indifferent reply.

"He should get married. An Assistant Resident has to receive a lot of company; and a house without a woman at the head makes a poor show."

"Our present Assistant has a very nice wife."

"It's a wonder that Mr. Fressenden doesn't follow his example."

"He will find a wife in time," replied Eola, as she added up the column of figures given her by the butler that morning. "I make it half an anna less than Ramachetty. I must go over it again."

"He had better not be too long about finding a wife," continued Mrs. Hulver, determined not to let the subject drop till she had had her say. "If a man waits too long he ages in looks and manners, and he is not taken for

himself. He may think that he is, for God deals out vanity with a liberal hand when a boy is born. But with a middle-aged man there are other considerations at the back of a woman's mind besides love ; like houses, for instance." She broke off shortly with a little laugh. "It tells on both sides for that matter. If William—that was my first—hadn't had a little property behind him, my mother would never have chosen him for her daughter with his dark complexion."

"Was he very much darker ? After all I think Ramachetty is right, and that it is my mistake not his."

"He was quite four shades darker than me ; some people might have said it was five ; but that was his age. Being older than me he showed it more."

"Yes, the butler has added it up correctly," said Eola, laying down her pen. "You were telling me about your first husband. It must have been a drawback to have had him darker than yourself."

"I am not so sure, miss, that it wasn't an advantage. William knew that he was blacker than me by several shades, and that I was his superior in European descent. Both his parents were Eurasians. With me it was only on one side, my mother's. That being so he never dared to check me or speak disrespectfully as country-born people are apt to do when they lose their tempers. It's a very powerful thing in our sex, is the tongue. I'm sure I don't know what we poor women would do without it. As William—that was my third—used to say : 'The tongue is a wonderful thing, Maria, me dear ! It may

be as sweet as sugar ; or sharp as a lime ; or as stinging as red pepper.' He used to add that the devil himself loosened Eve's tongue for her when she took the apple, knowing that she would have no chance with ould Adam unless she had that advantage."

Yet a third prospective husband, in Mrs. Hulver's opinion, appeared in the person of an executive engineer in the service of Government. He was highly favoured by the housekeeper since Delaine, her first husband, had been a subordinate in that same service. With renewed hope she flung herself into the campaign, and left nothing undone in the commissariat department that might propitiate and lead on a faltering suitor.

It was all to no purpose. He departed like the other two without speaking ; and Mrs. Hulver in her vexation could not refrain from unburdening herself on the subject at the first opportunity.

"When a man in the Public Works Department gets to be an executive engineer he ought to have a wife. Mr. Fearing is just throwing away his opportunities by keeping single. He seems such a nice gentleman, too. There ought to be no difficulty."

"Except that perhaps marriage has no attraction for him," suggested Eola.

Mrs. Hulver stared at her in sheer unbelief. The man or woman sound in mind and body who did not desire marriage in the abstract was unthinkable. Choice was another matter ; many an individual deferred making his choice for reasons that might be good, or indifferent,

but were sufficient all the same. It was impossible in her opinion that any one could look upon the estate of matrimony as undesirable.

“Begging your pardon, miss, if I may be so bold as to say so, I don’t think either you or your brother know much about marriage. Your minds have not been brought to bear upon it. As William—that was my second—used to say: ‘Thoughts are like guns; they are no use until they are trained on an object.’ You haven’t had an occasion to train yours yet on to marriage. Now in my case they’ve been trained all my life on matrimony, and I can speak with knowledge and experience. If a man tells you that he doesn’t want to get married, you may take it that either he can’t get the woman he wants, or he hasn’t made his choice. If a girl tells you that she doesn’t want to get married—” Mrs. Hulver actually panted with indignation at the mere thought of it—“She’s—she’s—well! she’s a liar—at least she is in this country.”

Eola’s light laugh was the only reply to such an assertion, and Mrs. Hulver took herself off to her sanctum at the back of the house with the nearest approach to wrath in her placid good nature she was capable of feeling.

Then Bernard Alderbury appeared on the scene, causing Mrs. Hulver doubt and perturbation of mind. He was a vigorous worker in the ranks of one of the large Church of England missionary societies, a strenuous parson who held a charmed life against the many evils

prowling in his field of labour. He seemed immune to the effects of bad water, coarse food, poisonous mosquitoes and a tropical sun. His exemption was not obtained by disregard of the conditions of Indian life up-country. On the contrary he observed the greatest care in safe-guarding himself by the use of such appliances as science provided. He took the minimum risk and the maximum care and forethought. Aided by a magnificent constitution and an endless store of confidence and hope that killed depression, he preserved the health and good spirits so essential to his particular work.

Wenaston and Alderbury were old college friends. When the missionary spirit threw its mantle over the latter, Wenaston, by no means an irreligious man, did his best to persuade the other from—as he put it—throwing himself away on the colonies and hiding his light under a bushel. A man of his abilities and private means should have different aspirations.

Alderbury received the advice in his light-hearted manner, and assured his friend that going to India as a missionary would prove his own salvation and keep him out of the morasses of modern thought and controversy.

“I must fight some one,” said Alderbury. “I don’t want civil war; I want an enemy outside the pale of Mother Church. Hinduism seems to me the very thing, a noble and worthy foe; an ancient faith, a marvellous system of philosophy with a crafty degenerate priesthood. Doesn’t the mere thought of it stir your blood and make you tingle to be up and fighting? Grafting upon the

obsolete creed something infinitely better, a glorious oriental Christ, soul-satisfying and sufficient, Who will lift India's millions into a fresher and purer atmosphere of life and thought."

Wenaston glanced at the shining eyes turned upon him in enthusiasm as he would have looked at the symptoms of an obscure disease. It was a thing he could neither understand nor account for; but some instinct made him hold his peace. If the man was right, well and good; if he proved wrong, he would find it out for himself. He forbore to comment or to combat the new resolve. Alderbury pursued the course he had mapped out for himself, and in due time went to India.

Wenaston continued the student and developed into the school-master. When a vacancy occurred in the college of Chirapore he was asked if he would accept it. Until that moment he had not thought of going to the East. His sister, who had a great desire to see India, added her weight to inclination, and he decided to take the appointment.

Once more the two friends met, and Alderbury rejoiced in the renewal of their intimacy; for among other facts he learned that none pressed more heavily upon him than the loneliness of the missionary's life, its isolation and the complete absence of congenial companionship. Under the circumstances it was not to be wondered at that he never lost an opportunity in his missionary itineration of spending a few days with the Doctor and his sister. It was a little out of his way, but

that did not mattter. The holiday was the more complete since there was no duty within reach. The missions he superintended were in British territory, beyond the borders of the native state. He would have established work of some sort in Chirapore, but he was not encouraged to do so by his society nor by the Government of the State. The society already had more than enough irons in the fire with an open field in British India clamouring for yet more workers. But Alderbury could never visit his friend without casting envious glances at the big classes of boys assembled in the college hall. He would dearly have liked a free hand on the platforms of the classrooms ; however this was not permissible. One of the conditions attached to the appointment of Principal was that there should be no attempt at proselytising ; a condition to which Wenaston easily subscribed, since he had not even a spark of missionary enthusiasm.

Eola was of her brother's way of thinking. She too looked at Alderbury's work with something like detached curiosity. His energy, his whole-hearted desire to see India Christianised, his indefatigable and unceasing sacrifice of self, appealed to the instinctive hero-worship that is implanted in every woman's breast ; but though she could wonder and admire and was insensibly drawn by his personality, she could not understand the fascination that held him to his chosen profession.

As for Mrs. Hulver she had her own reasons for disapproving of his visits, and it had nothing to do with his

missionary zeal. Nevertheless she did not fail to provide a table worthy of her master's position. The food was substantial rather than recherché, nourishing rather than dainty. She had formed some fixed opinions upon the subject of missionaries generally; they were deeply rooted and unalterable. As a class missionaries required feeding up; their wardrobes needed the services of the dirzee to mend and patch and darn. She was puzzled more than a little when she found that Alderbury paid no particular attention to the food, and ate sparingly, with a distinct inclination towards daintiness. As for his wardrobe it was in better condition in some respects and needed less attention than the Doctor's. Not a sock required darning; not a coat needed stitching; and what was more, his clothes were not only new and none the worse for wear, but they were of the best and finest description. The pay of a missionary was known to be of narrow proportions, leaving no margin for luxury. It did not seem fit and proper in her eyes that he should be better dressed than his host. That he possessed anything besides his salary did not enter Mrs. Hulver's head; because if he had private means he never would have come to India as a missionary; he would have adopted the military service and been an officer in the army.

Alderbury came and went at his own convenience, never announcing his proposed visit by more than a day or two, and never prolonging it beyond the two or three nights, which gave him at least one complete day's rest,

so essential sometimes to the worker for whom Sunday is the busiest day of the week. How intensely the man enjoyed that day his hosts had little suspicion. Whether he discussed the latest theory in science or religion with Wenaston, or the latest novel with Eola, it was all pure happiness unclouded by a single anxiety.

Mrs. Hulver was the only person who was disturbed. The laughter of the happy trio awoke no sympathetic joy in her. She was relieved when she heard only the low tone of the masculine voices, indicating that Miss Wenaston was taking no part in the conversation. It was fortunate for her peace of mind that she could not see Eola's eyes dwelling on the long figure extended in the cane lounge placed between her own easy chair and her brother's; nor how she watched him when, carried away by excitement, he pulled himself forward and even sprang to his feet the better to emphasise what he had to say. As he stood before them, speaking to the Doctor, but often turning his deepset eyes upon Eola, the girl thought of St. Paul. By what mysterious force was he driven? What fire was it that kindled in his eyes as he talked and made him look different from any other man she had known? The Indian world as she knew it was very peaceful; the people of the native State of Chirakul were notorious for their content and for the absence of all sedition and unrest. Yet to hear him talk one might be brought to the belief that it was not a peaceful model native state, but an enemy's land, a field for a deadly battle with a worthy foe.

Alderbury passed out of their little world as suddenly as he came in, leaving them slumberous and quiescent. Eola missed him, but Mrs. Hulver indulged in a sigh of relief. Much as she desired to see Eola married she drew a rigid line at missionaries. Not that missionaries should be debarred from marriage. On the contrary, a wife was more needful in the mission house than anywhere else. But the missionary's wife belonged, in her opinion, to quite another class. She did not know where the wives were bred. They were endowed with many admirable virtues, and were eminently suited to be helpers to their worthy husbands in proselytising among the heathen ; but of one thing she was sure ; there was a wide difference between them and Miss Wenaston. Their rambling bungalows had a certain amount of plain solid comfort about them ; and they made the best of the country fare that their limited salaries obliged them to buy, but there was nothing dainty in either dress or food or furniture.

The large compounds in which their dwellings were placed contained outbuildings where the natives gathered for instruction ; both bungalow and compound were haunted with mild-looking converts in white muslin ; their happy faces an indication that Christianity and the pastoral supervision of the missionary agreed with them.

On the other hand who ever heard of a missionary's wife being invited to the Presidency town to take a share in social festivities ? Who ever saw, asked Mrs. Hulver, with raised eyebrows, " a missionary's lady " at a race meet or at a Government House ball ? Miss Wenaston

belonged to the class that welcomed Viceroys and figured at races and balls. Thus it happened that after some of these flying visits Mrs. Hulver had remarks to make.

“Missionaries are very good sort of people in their way. I often wonder how they can keep it up.”

“Keep what up ? ” asked Eola, mystified.

“Their spirits and their belief that they are doing these natives good.”

“Of course they are doing good, Mrs. Hulver,” said Eola, as if she were slightly shocked. The half-formed doubt occasionally slipped unbidden into her own mind but she had never put it into words.

“I didn’t say that they were not doing good. I left it open. As William—that was my first—used to say when the native overseers had too big a grasp on the profits : ‘ You can’t wash a crow white nor expect anything of him but a croak.’ It’s the thought of the millions and millions of heathen in India that is apt to stagger one. It’s like trying to empty a tank with a teaspoon. However, as William—that was my second—used to say when I was down-hearted about the way anything was going : ‘ You lay your brick and lay it sound and leave the rest to others. No man ever built a church steeple all by himself and yet old England is full of churches and steeples.’ Anyway, I shouldn’t like to be a missionary’s wife. I could dress up to it ; I could feed up to it ; but I couldn’t stand the converts trapesing through the

compound and hanging about the verandahs. I shouldn't feel as if the house belonged to me."

"Perhaps it wouldn't be necessary to have them there," suggested Eola, who read between the lines with secret amusement.

"Oh ! yes, it would ; it's their reward ; their right," replied Mrs. Hulver with conviction. "Any lady that's suitable to be a missionary's wife makes no objection ; but she must be, so to speak, born to it. It's not a job that would suit you, miss. As William—that was my third—said when he heard that the Chaplain was going to marry the Colonel's daughter : 'If the church mouse takes the field mouse to wife there'll be a difference of opinion about the mode of living.' You could never put up with mission ways."

"You never did any mission work, I suppose," said Eola, turning the conversation from a subject she was not prepared to discuss with her housekeeper.

"No miss ; but my husband William—that was my second—he tried his hand at it once, only once. He saw some of the canteen servants doing pujah to a stone image that stood under a tree behind the canteen. He went up to them in the middle of the pujah and said : 'Boys, you're all going to hell that way.' One of them that served the Presbyterian minister spoke up and said : 'No sar ! It's the Roman Catholics that are going to hell, not us !' William walked away without another word ; and when I asked him about it, he said that missionary work wasn't his job, and that he would

leave it to those who knew more about it than he did."

"It was very good of him to make the attempt."

Mrs. Hulver looked pleased at the praise and approbation of the departed William the second.

"He was a right-minded man about everything, loyal to his God and his King ; and he was the father of my only child."

CHAPTER XI

EOLA sat at the tea-table in the verandah. Her brother, punctual to the stroke of four, came in without haste, crossing the compound from the college buildings to the private house. Punctuality, he declared, was his salvation. He could not have stood the rush of work had he not rigidly adhered to the hours of his meals. Afternoon tea was the one he liked best. He gave himself exactly thirty minutes for it. It was thirty minutes of solid rest.

“Where’s Alderbury,” he asked, as he seated himself in a comfortable cane chair.

“He has gone to see Ananda.”

“You don’t mind if I read, do you, Eola? The new magazines came two days ago and I haven’t had time even to open them.”

He tore off the cover of an illustrated monthly and handed it to her. A second magazine was opened for himself, and he was soon deep in an article professing to give the last word on the chemistry of biology. Whilst he read he drank his tea. A bell rang and he jumped up, instantly detaching himself from the magazine and breaking off in the middle of a paragraph. He hurried

away in the direction of the college without another thought for his visitor. At his departure Mrs. Hulver appeared.

“When you go out, Miss, will you kindly get some carpet thread for the tailor. The motor is ready.”

“I can’t leave the house till Mr. Alderbury has come in. He promised to be back to tea at four o’clock. He must have been detained.”

“Oh, yes, miss, I daresay he has been detained,” assented Mrs. Hulver. “Our master might be kept if he chose to allow it. As William—that was my third—used to say: ‘There are some men who will be in time for every meal, hungry or not; and there are others who will be in time for nothing but their own funerals.’”

Eola ignored the implied depreciation of her guest and proceeded to give orders that would ensure his comfort.

“We shall want another pot of tea, please. Tell the matey to keep the kettle boiling, and he is not to make the tea until Mr. Alderbury comes in.”

“If you like to go out now, miss, I can see to Mr. Alderbury and give him his tea. I am sure he won’t mind. His head is that full of his missioning that he won’t notice whether it is poured out by you or by me. As William—that was my first—used to say: ‘When a man is bothered by business he has no room in his head for a woman and can’t tell one from another.’ Mr. Alderbury is bothered with this business of Pantulu Iyer’s son coming Christian. It has all been done in a

hurry, as I was telling you. As William—that was my third—used to say——”

What William the third said was lost in the sudden appearance of the guest.

“So sorry I’m late, Miss Wenaston. Yes, please, I should like some tea. What with the dust and the amount of talking I’ve done, I’m as thirsty as a fish.”

He hurried away to his room to get rid of the powdery ochre blown up from the laterite roads. Mrs. Hulver glanced after him with as much disapproval as she dared to show.

“Next to schoolmasters, missionaries should be particular in being punctual. As William—that was my second—used to say: ‘Men should be valued like watches for the time they keep.’”

“And he was quite right from a military point of view. Will you see about the tea, please, Mrs. Hulver!”

“It’s being made, miss. I’ve got my eye on the matey. It will be ready as soon as Mr. Alderbury is ready for it. Like as not he will read those letters that have come while he has been away and forget all about his tea.” Mrs. Hulver looked at Eola as much as to say, “And you too.” She continued: “A man with a lot of business needs a good head. As William—that was my second—used to say: ‘Drive your business with a firm hand and a clear head or your business will drive you.’”

Alderbury’s appearance checked the flow of Mrs.

Hulver's wisdom, and she departed to her room. As he received his cup from Eola's hand he said :

" You would like to hear how I fared, I am sure."

" Yes, please ; tell me all about it."

The words did not ring quite true ; they were wanting in sympathy, and seemed to the quick sensitive ear of the missionary to be spoken more out of polite curiosity than real interest. He glanced at her and tried to swallow some of the scalding liquid with the aid of the teaspoon. The innate love of fighting in a good cause rose within him, and he determined to try conclusions with her. She should become interested, and more. He would conquer her indifference and rouse her sympathy.

" I had no end of a difficulty in seeing the parents. It was the father I wanted to get at and he was very inaccessible."

" You had an interview with Ananda, of course. I knew him in England, and should like to hear how he is getting on. I don't care a bit about his stupid old father. Why can't the father let the son alone, and allow him to take his own line ? "

" The step involves so much."

" If that is so, then Ananda shouldn't have taken it."

Alderbury put down his cup suddenly, his mind entirely diverted from the business of tea-drinking by her words.

" You don't mean that you really think he ought not to have become a Christian ? " he inquired, in a grave voice that had lost the lightness with which he had greeted her on arrival home from his visit.

The seriousness of his manner awoke a spirit of perverseness.

“I am of the opinion that he might have had more consideration for his father’s feelings,” she said, with a levity that jarred. “Why should existing relations that seemed so satisfactory be disturbed?” Then, as Alderbury remained silent, she continued: “There is a time for all things. It is too soon to ask educated India to accept Christianity; the way is studded with such colossal difficulties. Don’t you often feel that you are fighting against almost insuperable obstacles?”

“In short you think it would be more expedient for the missionary to run away or temporise, instead of buckling on his armour and standing up to the enemy. What about our responsibilities and lending a helping hand to our fellow-men? The marsh is a good enough place for the horse to wallow in, and the man enjoying the firm ground of the meadow has no duty towards the poor beast! Miss Wenaston, that is a poor creed.”

“Are you so sure that the Hindu is in the mud?” she asked, more in a spirit of provocation than honest inquiry.

There was a fearful fascination in rousing him, and she took the risk of his anger for the pure pleasure of seeing him come up to the fighting line. The eyes that met hers shone with the light of battle, and she inwardly trembled at the spirit she had wantonly raised.

“Am I sure, you ask?” he cried derisively. “If you knew what Hinduism meant you would never put

such a question to a man of my profession. You cannot realise how encrusted it is with insidious error appealing mischievously to the sensual part of humanity. You know nothing of the practices at the worship of Kali—of the life led by the dasis in the temples of Southern India——” he stopped abruptly, conscious of having been led in his excitement and enthusiasm a little too far. It was impossible to pursue such an unsavoury subject with an English woman.

“I don’t know much about the worship of Kali; and I am sure that I never heard the word dasi before. What is a dasi?”

“Oh! never mind,” he exclaimed, the fire subdued. “Please give me another cup of tea, and I will tell you about Ananda. Perhaps when you hear what has driven him out of the faith of his ancestors, you will be able to sympathise.”

He explained the theory of transmigration, and how Ananda had revolted against it on the loss of his friend; how he put himself under instruction in England and took the step voluntarily and without pressure. From the story of his conversion he passed on to the description of all that had followed since Ananda arrived in India.

“The man is being persecuted in all kinds of ways. They have supplied him with food, but they have employed an out-caste sweeper to carry it to him. The prejudice of fifty generations is not to be conquered all at once, and Ananda cannot bring himself to receive his food at the hands of a man whom he holds more unclean

than we should consider an unwashed workman who had just emptied a sewer."

"How has he been existing?"

"On biscuits and milk, a poor diet for a healthy hungry man. It has kept him from starvation however. Your brother did wisely in sending for me after receiving Ananda's letter. He needs advice and support, and he will require help of another kind when the small amount of cash in his pocket is finished."

"I suppose you talked to him—and prayed with him?" said Eola, conscious of the banality of her words even as she spoke them.

"Dear lady! does a man stop to fall on his knees when he sees a comrade drowning? You will think me a poor sort of missionary, perhaps, when I confess that I forgot to pray with him. I was too busy chucking life-belts to the poor chap. Already he was assailed with doubts as to the wisdom of the step he had taken. 'I have been too hasty,' he said. 'I did not consider how seriously it would affect my father's peace of mind and his health.' Then he drew a picture of the old man's feeble appearance as he came to him two or three mornings ago in the compound. 'He was so bowed and bent he might have been seventy instead of fifty.' It gave him a shock, and he seems to have entertained a suggestion made by his father which was nothing less than the contemplation of partial apostacy. I fought against the weakness. I preached free-will and choice. I appealed to his honesty and combated the cowardice that

prompted retrogression. He admitted that he could never again accept the Hindu doctrine of transmigration. Then I pointed out the responsibility that falls on a man's shoulders when his eyes are opened and the choice of road lies with him. I dug away and rooted about to find a little courage. He has more obstinacy than courage at present. I hope that the one will breed the other."

While he talked he drank tea and devoured bread and butter with the wholesome hunger of a schoolboy. Mrs. Hulver appeared once more.

"The motor is waiting, miss. I'm afraid I can't do without the carpet thread."

"I will go at once," replied Eola, rising from the tea-table to put on her hat. "Will you come for a run in the car, Mr. Alderbury?"

"I should like it immensely," he replied with a promptness that did not escape the ears of the house-keeper.

She was not satisfied with the result of her interruption to the conversation. By despatching Miss Wenaston on a shopping errand she had aimed at putting an end to the *tête-à-tête*. The guest, she supposed, would be driven to his room or into the garden until Dr. Wenaston was released from his duties and could join him. As Eola disappeared in the direction of her room Alderbury turned in his impulsive way to Mrs. Hulver.

"I haven't had a moment to ask you after yourself. How have you been since we last met?"

“I’ve been keeping pretty well, thank you, sir. All that troubles me is the haricot veins in my legs. If I stand about too much, they swell and become very painful.”

“How is your son?”

Mrs. Hulver beamed suddenly, and the severe expression that she had worn since he appeared in the verandah vanished. Next to talking about her late husbands she loved to expand on the subject of her boy.

“He is very well and grown quite the man. He tells me that he has just been made a corporal. He’s in his father’s old regiment, and it has been ordered out at once. He ought to be landing in less than a week’s time. He has promised to come off and see his old mother the first minute he can get leave. They say that the regiment is going to Bangalore. If so I shall see him often.”

“I hope he will prove a good son.”

“No fear but what he will,” said Mrs. Hulver, with the unshaken confidence of a proud mother. “He is happy in his work and likes soldiering. As William—that was my second and the boy’s own father—used to say when I talked of the child following any other trade: ‘Bring up the foal to the shafts and don’t try to teach him to drive a wheelbarrow.’”

“He was perfectly right; each man should follow the line for which he is best suited.”

“But they don’t do so always. There are many men—and women, too—who, being square, find themselves

in round holes. Now you, sir, I take it, are in the right-shaped hole. So am I ; and so is Miss Wenaston. She would do badly in my hole, for instance ; for she would be cheated every hour of her life by these bud-mashes of servants ; and she would be still worse off in your hole. There's nothing of the missionary about her, as any one can see with half an eye. As William—that was my third—used to say : ‘ It doesn't need a uniform to show you who's a born soldier. He was a fine figure and had a handsome—— ’

Miss Wenaston appeared and the car drew up under the portico, cutting Mrs. Hulver short. She watched the pair drive away with renewed misgivings. “ I don't like that look in her face. She's feeling just as I used to feel when William, my second and the father of my boy, took me out walking in the bazaar, he looking so fine in his corporal's uniform.” She called to the butler. “ Ramachetty ! Come here ; I want you. To-morrow is pay-day. I'm going out into the garden to count the roses. Where's the gardener ? ”

She descended the steps of the front verandah and walked slowly, displaying an imposing dignity, to the spot where the roses stood. She counted the pots.

“ —six—seven— ” As she arrived at the seventh the gardener pointed with feverish anxiety to the eighth. It bore a beautiful double pink blossom full of fragrance, proclaiming itself a true and genuine *La France*. “ Eight ; good ! Wasn't it just as I said ? ” she asked the butler triumphantly. “ With care the roses would turn back

to their proper sort. Why haven't the others turned, too ? " she inquired, looking severely at the gardener.

" They are turning now ; all coming nicely if missus will please wait."

" Mind they do come," she replied, lifting a warning finger that indicated a determination to exact the fulfilment of her demand.

" Missus will let off the fine ! " said the gardener in an insinuating voice.

" Certainly not ! There will be four rupees fine to-morrow ; four rupees kept back until the missie has twelve good, sweet-smelling double pink roses."

" I am a very poor man ! " whined the gardener. " I have a large family and two wives, both big hungry women. What can I do if missus stops my pay ? "

" You should have thought of that before you spoilt the roses," said Mrs. Hulver, showing no sign of relenting.

" I am not a bad man," pleaded the gardener. " Missus must please forgive. I am same religion as missus—a Christian—— "

" What ! " cried Mrs. Hulver, with such startling emphasis that they all jumped, butler, gardener and gardener's assistants.

" A Christian, a poor worm of a Christian, same religion as missus and master and missie ! "

" How dare you call yourself a Christian ? " cried Mrs. Hulver, in deep indignation. " How dare you say that you belong to the same religion as me and the master and our missie ? You ! a spoiler of roses ! you ! a lazy

idle budmash of a gardener! You! with two big hungry wives!"

The unfortunate bigamist trembled visibly before this outpouring of wrath. He felt that he had made a false step.

"Ramachetty! is that man a Christian?" she asked, turning to the butler with an abruptness that upset his self-possession.

"I never heard that he was, ma'am. He doesn't belong to my Church, the Roman Church."

"Is it true that he has got two wives?"

"Yes, ma'am; one to cook and keep the house, and the other to mind the field and the buffalo and make the butter. My Church doesn't allow two wives."

"No; nor any other Christian Church. He calls himself a Christian because he thinks I shall be sorry for him and let him off his fine. Tell him that only heathen people marry two wives and turn pink roses into red. He is the sort of budmash who brings Christianity into disgrace. I'll double his fine if he dares to say again that he belongs to my religion. When he has learned to keep pink double roses pink and double, then we will talk about his being a Christian and belonging to our religion; but mind! I don't give him much hope. I never knew any missionary that allowed two wives."

The butler was not indifferent to the pronoun used by Mrs. Hulver when she spoke of "our religion." He dismissed the gardener to his duties and followed the housekeeper to the back verandah. She retired to her

room to make out the pay-list for the establishment. Against the gardener's name she ventured to write the full sum of his wages and made no note of any fine.

“Those four missing plants will all be back by to-morrow unless I am very much mistaken. Christian or heathen, I'll keep him and the rest of them up to the Christian standard or my name is not Maria Hulver. As William my third used to say, he having been in the Artillery: ‘Drive your team straight whether they're horses or mules, and you and your guns will get over the ground without a spill.’”

CHAPTER XII

AFTER dinner that same evening Alderbury sat in the verandah with Eola and her brother. The end of the verandah was enclosed with a trellis over which creepers were trained. From the roof hung a lantern that shed a subdued light. If Eola desired to work or her brother to read, a lamp was brought and placed upon a table. This evening the lamp was not required.

While the servants waited at table, Alderbury could not speak of the subject uppermost in his mind. No sooner had the coffee been handed round and the cigars lighted, than Ananda's name was brought up, and he described his visit to the convert.

The chief thing accomplished was the moral support he had been able to give to the convert. He devoutly hoped that it would sustain Ananda until something could be effected to improve his condition. All that had happened since his return home was quite sufficient in itself to induce depression; and there was always a danger lest depression should be followed by apostacy.

"I want your help, Wenaston," said Alderbury suddenly.

"You shall have it," the other responded without hesitation.

"You promise without knowing what it is."

"You want to borrow the motor-car. It shall be ready at sunrise to-morrow. I can't drive you myself, much as I should like it. I haven't time. The chauffeur will take you where you want to go."

"I shall be very grateful. The car transforms travelling from purgatory to pure delight. It was not the car, however, that was in my mind. I want something else—help for Ananda. His money won't hold out a week longer, and then it will be in the power of his people to starve him."

"He will have to take food from his pariah servant—a practical beginning of his education in the brotherhood of man," remarked Wenaston.

"Lately no food of any description has been sent to his room. Unless I am very much mistaken the supply will stop altogether."

"And his father will give him no money?"

"I am sure of that."

"What are Ananda's rights as a son? Can't he claim assistance and support from his nearest relatives by his caste laws?"

"If he were still a member of the Hindu religion he could claim house-room, food and clothing from his father. These benefits are conceded by the unwritten law of caste custom. Having abandoned his faith and

become an outcaste, he loses all his rights legal and social."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite certain. I called on the chief lawyer in the town on my way back to find out what his position really was—the reason I was late for tea, Miss Wenaston—and from him I learned the law regarding converts to Christianity as it stands in the native State."

"Is it different from the law in British India?"

"Entirely; the 'vert has no legal standing at all, no civil rights whatever. He is an outcaste in every sense; in other words an outlaw. Neither by inheritance, nor by deed of gift, nor by a duly executed will can he inherit his father's property. He has no power to compel his wife to live with him. She may contract any other alliance she chooses as if he had never existed; and he has absolutely no control over his children. What is more they are empowered to divide his patrimony among themselves exactly as if he were dead."

"How unjust!" exclaimed Eola in indignation.

"It is nothing less than iniquitous," responded Alderbury, with some warmth. "But there it stands. We cannot alter it and Ananda must face it."

"He should get away from his home and his people; he is at too great a disadvantage where he is," remarked Dr. Wenaston.

"Exactly so; and we must help him," said Alderbury.

"If it means a sum of money, of course I am ready——"

"I don't want your money, Wenaston," protested Alderbury, speaking rapidly as was his wont when excited. "I want your help in another way. Ananda is very unwilling to leave his home to which he has only just returned. He is devoted to his parents and cannot at present bring himself to believe that they are lending themselves to this system of persecution. He attributes it to his uncle. Until he has proof that his father's hand is actually turned against him, he wishes to continue living under his roof. He would like to obtain work of some sort in Chirapore that would enable him to keep house with his wife and child separately. Can you find anything for him to do in your school? He is quite capable of teaching English, mathematics, history, geography or anything of that sort to boys."

Wenaston was silent and unresponsive to the appeal.

"I suppose you haven't a vacancy and don't see your way to making one on the staff," said Alderbury in a disappointed tone.

"As it happens there is a vacancy, but——"

"Why this hesitation, then? It would be a clear way out of our immediate difficulty if you would give him a trial. I feel sure he can teach. You know him personally and need no testimonial as to his character."

"I wasn't hesitating over his character or his qualifications as a teacher. I was wondering how much sympathy was extended in the town to the family, and whether feeling runs strong on the subject of his conversion."

“It will not affect his status in the college. Of course he understands that religious discussion is prohibited. You may depend upon him for not proselytising ; he will not even introduce the subject ; and I am sure that he will be ready to fall in with your wishes in every way. Poor fellow ! I know he will be very grateful.”

The pleading on the part of Alderbury roused Eola’s sympathy, and she added her entreaty to his.

“You must lend him a helping hand ! ”

“It is against my better judgment,” replied her brother, giving in reluctantly.

“If it doesn’t answer you can put an end to the arrangement at once ; a day’s notice, if you like, will be sufficient. Take him on for a week, and let me hear at the end of it whether the plan is working successfully or not. It will be a great relief to my mind to know that he has employment of some kind, not only as a means of living but also as occupation. Later on I will try to persuade him to leave Chirapore and get work elsewhere. With a testimonial from you he should have no difficulty in finding a situation as schoolmaster in one of our missions. If he will only sever his connection with his family and place himself beyond their influence I see a grand future before him in the mission field. We so rarely win over a man of good caste. At present he clings with all the force of a great love to his family and to his wife and child. Patience ! patience ! I am a most impatient man, Miss Wenaston,” he

concluded, turning to her with a boyish laugh that echoed through the verandah.

Having discussed the details of Ananda's immediate employment, Alderbury dropped into a thoughtful silence. From a few words spoken casually by the Doctor he was not satisfied that Wenaston appreciated and valued Ananda's conversion as much as he should. Eola's remark earlier in the day also hung in his mind ; yet he did not want to preach or to talk shop, as he sometimes called it. His difficulty of finding an opening was solved by a question put by Eola herself in the pause that ensued.

" You said this afternoon that I knew nothing about Hinduism. Don't you think you might enlighten me a little ? I am open to conviction, and quite ready to believe that the Hindus will be the better for the Christianity you are giving them. Of course idolatry is only fit for savages, and the people of India ought to adopt something better as they are not savages."

" You mustn't think that the Hindus are a nation of idolators. The ignorant masses worship idols and probably believe that the images themselves have some mysterious power of divinity in them ; but the educated Hindu will tell you that the idol is symbolical ; that they look beyond and through the image to the Deity. Their conception of the Deity is different from ours. He is impersonal and He is the creator of good and evil."

" A bold theory of the infinitude of the Deity on one hand and the existence of evil on the other," said

Wenaston, who was listening, although Alderbury addressed his remarks to Eola.

“The Hindu believes that the world exists for a retributive purpose so that spirits may find embodiment, and suffer pain and joy according to their deserts. Through their sufferings in cycles of rebirths they progress towards their final state of impersonal beatitude. The retributive world with its process is eternal and lasts through all ages. If the world dies, it dies to be born again.”

“A wonderful conception but deadening in its effects, whether one contemplates rebirth in this world or absorption into Brahma,” commented Wenaston. “The marvel to me is that Hinduism has held its own so long.”

“Its preservation is due to its wonderful system, its width and breadth. It preaches on one hand an asceticism which is acceptable to the most exacting fanatic. On the other it gives a licence, in the name of religion and the worship of Kali, that appeals irresistibly to the lowest and most sensual side of man. Hitherto its isolation and its marvellous power of absorbing other religious systems have been a tower of strength ; but it cannot be saved much longer from the inrush of the modern spirit and stands in danger of being broken down.”

“By what ? ” asked Eola.

“By the response to modern thought and by the awakening of Hindus like Ananda to a yearning after something better. Under the influence of the new spirit

of inquiry they are demanding more freedom, more spirituality in their doctrines. They revolt as Ananda has revolted against the hopeless theory of transmigration, and they require something more satisfying in its place."

"The Hindus are a religious people, with strong cravings that must be satisfied. This is shown clearly by the absence of any desire on the part of my boys to shirk their religious duties," said Wenaston.

"By and bye those boys won't be content with the performance of superstitious pujah with a pantheistic leaning. They will require one God for India, not a million gods; they will demand an uplifting of suffering humanity, and they will rebel against a horrible creed of fatalism and predestination."

"What have you to offer to a man like Ananda?"

"Our own faith."

"Can he comprehend it with its spiritual teaching?"

"Ask him some day and he will tell you that in the teaching of Christ and in the following of Christ's example he has found a soul-satisfying substitute for his worn-out creed and childish rituals."

"Alderbury, you are an incorrigible iconoclast. With one blow you would annihilate the longest-lived religion of the world!"

He was on his feet in a moment, as was his way when excited, and his voice rang out into the night.

"You obsolete old professor! you bag of dry bones!" he cried, as he strode up and down the verandah. "The

ancient Greeks and Romans killed their conquered enemies, I know ; but modern conquerors pursue a different plan. They preserve ; at the same time they subdue and bend the conquered to their will, making use of the good and pruning away the bad. We shall treat Hinduism in the modern manner ; remodelling its rites and its institutions. Even that bugbear to all mission work, caste, shall be reformed. Hinduism will be transfigured in God's good time by the spirituality of Christ. It will merge into a fuller, richer Christianity than we of the less imaginative West have ever contemplated."

Eola felt the blood coursing through her veins with an emotion that was startling. Alderbury's enthusiasm, his magnificent faith, his absolute optimism and trust in the future roused her admiration, almost her envy. She felt the infection of his hope and belief ; but because she was a woman, there was something behind it that detached her mind from the cause for which he battled, and centred her thoughts upon the man himself. While she listened, carried away by his words, she was conscious of his splendid personality, his strength, his confidence, his purity of heart. He was a born leader of men with a strong personal influence that was not to be denied ; and the messenger occupied her mind more than the message he carried. Alderbury was unlike any one else of her acquaintance ; and each time they met she became conscious of a growing attraction that she was unwilling to acknowledge even to herself.

When the hour for retirement came, Wenaston said good-night to his guest and departed to his sitting-room to read. Eola stood for a few minutes after she had shaken hands. Alderbury waited, his quickened perception where human beings were concerned telling him that she had something to say which was for his ear only.

"I am sorry I spoke as I did about Ananda and his religion. I am afraid I gave you the impression that I thought one religion as good as another."

"It certainly crossed my mind that such was your attitude," he replied gravely.

"I ought not to have said that it was a pity that he had changed. I am sorry."

She was sweet in her penitence, and Alderbury was constrained to take a firm grip of himself.

"People have a habit of making loose statements of that kind, and of expressing a vague regret that we interfere with the Hindu creed. They don't realise what they are practically admitting."

"It is so! I have often heard English men and women say that they would rather have a good heathen servant for instance, than an indifferent Christian."

"The standard of one is entirely different from the standard of the other. A 'good heathen's' religion makes the practice of certain sins a religious act. Among the 'indifferent Christians' there are a great many who have no religion at all; but they claim to be of the faith of those they serve, thinking that they will be more favoured."

“ I mustn’t get into the habit of making loose statements.”

“ Nor of believing everything a native tells you. I am sure Mrs. Hulver is careful how she receives what they say of themselves. I should like to hear her on the subject, and also on their habits, good and bad. She would be sure to quote one of the Williams.”

“ I know what they would have said ! ” cried Eola, the cloud dispersed, and on good terms with herself again. “ William the first would have held that habits had their advantages and might be acquired with discretion. William the second’s views would have been more rigid. Habits were good and bad ; the good were to be adopted at all costs and the bad avoided. William the third would have been of the opinion that habits, good and bad, were unavoidable in poor weak human natures and must be accepted with the man.”

Alderbury’s laugh rang out ; and Mrs. Hulver, dropping off to sleep on her cot under the mosquito curtains, heard it. She stirred in sleepy protest. Missionaries had no right to joke and laugh like that with “ society ladies.” How could they expect to convert the heathen if they indulged in such levity ? As William used to say—— ; but here she fell asleep and happily forgot Miss Wenaston and the missionary, together with the words of wisdom that fell from the lips of her trinity of Williams.

CHAPTER XIII

AT sunrise Alderbury started off in the motor to drive back to that particular mission centre of which he was the superintendent. It was situated in British India, about forty miles from the town of Chirapore.

On his way he stopped at the house of Pantulu. He walked quickly round to the side where the room assigned to Ananda was situated. He found him sitting on his deck chair in the open doorway. He was trying to concentrate his attention on a book, but his eyes often wandered to the hills. He heard the tread of footsteps and looked up expectantly. As soon as he caught sight of Alderbury he rose, pleasure plainly written on his face.

"I did not think that you would have time to call and see me again," he said, as he shook hands warmly.

"Dr. Wenaston's offer of the car has made it possible. I come with good news. He has consented to my suggestion that you should take up a post as junior master in the school. The salary you will draw will enable you to support yourself and make you independent of your father."

Ananda's eyes grew bright at the prospect and he

questioned his visitor eagerly as to his duties. They were explained, together with the subjects that were forbidden.

“I shall like it beyond all things,” said Ananda. “For the present I will go on living here. I am getting used to the room. It is not as bad as it looks.”

“Have your people sent you any food this morning ; any coffee and rice cakes ? ”

“No ; they have never yet sent me anything in the early morning. The pariah has returned, I am glad to say, with permission to sweep and perform his usual duties.”

Alderbury began to dive into the deep pockets of his travelling overcoat. He produced bread, butter, a bottle of strong coffee, cake, sugar, salt and various other eatables.

“You don’t mind accepting these things from Miss Wenaston. Her housekeeper gave them to me with her own hands. When you go to the college to-morrow morning, call at the house and say you are grateful.”

“Of course I will. I’ll see the housekeeper as well as Miss Wenaston.”

“And let me give you another piece of advice, Ananda. You must fill up the whole day with regular employment, whether you are at the college or at home. You must not allow yourself to drift into the habit of idleness. It is bad for any man, European or Indian. You must read and make notes of what you read. You must write to me and tell me what you are teaching your class. I will send you some books addressed to

the care of Miss Wenaston as soon as I get back ; and if you want lighter literature you can borrow of her."

They talked of various matters for some time, and then Alderbury looked at his watch.

"Half-past eight ! how the time flies ! Is that your man outside ? Hi ! come here ! I want you !" he called in the man's language.

The sweeper ran forward, and Alderbury gave him directions.

"Go to the car and bring me a small basket you will find on the seat."

The pariah returned and was directed to lift the lid, which he did. As he held it open Alderbury took out a packet of sandwiches.

"I may as well save time by eating my breakfast whilst I talk."

The food disappeared without any hindrance to the conversation, and the fact that it had been received from the pariah did not affect the missionary's appetite.

"Put down the basket and give me that bottle and cup," said Alderbury to the man. "Hold the cup while I pour."

The thermos flask was full of steaming coffee, and Alderbury took the brimming cup from the hand of the despised pariah, giving him back the flask to replace in the tiffin basket.

"This is Mrs. Hulver's own make ; I never tasted better coffee. You have got the same brew in that bottle, but without milk. It should last you three or

four days. Boil your milk and add it to the cold coffee. Don't heat the coffee or you will spoil the flavour. I was to be sure and tell you this from Mrs. Hulver. Good-bye and good luck go with your new venture. Come along my man; bring that basket and put it in the motor."

The lesson was not without its effect although nothing was actually said. Somehow when the Englishman accepted food from the hand of the pariah the action had a different complexion, and it set Ananda thinking. Alderbury hoped it would bear good fruit, and help to make matters easier if the time should come when no food was obtainable except through the pariah. He was anxious to be off, and he bade Ananda good-bye, parting with him at the entrance of the little yard where the gourd spread its vivid green foliage.

As he approached the gateway of the compound leading into the road a messenger met him with a request that he would come into the verandah in front of the house. Pantulu Iyer desired a word with him. Quite ready for an interview whatever might be its nature, hostile or friendly, he mounted the stone steps.

A few minutes elapsed before Pantulu, accompanied by his wife, appeared. They approached silently, their hands placed together palm to palm, and stood before him with bowed heads.

"Sir!" began Pantulu, then he paused, unable to command his voice.

"Speak, Pantulu Iyer; what do you wish to say? I am ready to listen."

Alderbury's gentle manner broke down the nervous constraint and opened the flood-gates of speech. In a voice that was so charged with emotion as to be near breaking point, the old man prayed for the missionary's assistance in the restoration of his son, his only child. There were numbers of others, he pleaded, who were ready and willing to join the Christian religion. Their apostacy would not be felt by their families. With him it was different. In taking away his son the missionary deprived him and his father and grandfather of happiness in a future life. Who was to perform the shraddah ceremonies when he, Pantulu, was dead, if his son Ananda refused to perform them ? The thought of his fate and the fate of his ancestors was intolerable, unbearable, appalling!

As he poured forth his entreaty Gunga's tears flowed down her haggard cheeks and fell upon the folds of her tawny silk saree. Her grey hair was dishevelled, and its silvery strands were sprinkled with the dust she had thrown upon her head according to custom in overwhelming grief or misfortune.

Keenly sympathetic to human trouble at all times, Alderbury could not listen unmoved. The appearance of both father and mother told its own tale, and he fully realised the havoc that had been wrought in one of the happiest homes of India. It was ever the same, even from the very beginning of the story of Christianity, he thought with a sigh. All pioneer work must run on similar lines ; and although he knew that it was inevitable, his heart ached at the sight of their distress.

“ If you feel thus about the future why not take the same path your son has taken ? He is right. Go with him and you will find such joy and peace in your old age as you have never experienced before.”

“ Can the bullock learn a new method of drawing the cart after spending all its life under the yoke ? We cannot change at our age. We must follow in the footsteps of our fathers. Oh ! sir ! if you would only say the word, and bid my son remember his poor old father, all might yet be made right. Let him conform outwardly, whatever he may believe inwardly, for our sake.”

Yielding to a sudden impulse, Pantulu and his wife fell at Alderbury's feet, touching their foreheads to the ground. By this time the tears were falling from the old man's eyes.

“ Our son ! our dearly loved son ! Give us back our child, our little one ! the only child that was ever sent by the gods to bless us ! ”

Not a word of reproach was mingled with the prayer which made it all the harder for the missionary to bear.

“ He cannot return to you. You must go to him,” repeated Alderbury.

“ Sir ! if you will bring him back to us—and he will come ! I know he will ! if you so much as hold up your finger—I will give you a lac of rupees to build a temple for your God. Your God is merciful and kind. He will take the church in exchange for the only son of two heart-broken parents. He will be satisfied if you build it large and put much gold and jewels in the sacred place.

You shall have money and jewels and gold and silk and rich carpets and hangings—all these and more than you ask you shall have, if you will only give him back to us.”

“Give him back to me, his mother! Let me have my little one again! my little one whose tiny hands upon my neck awoke the mother-love within me,” prayed the proud Gunga at his feet in abject humility.

It was getting beyond Alderbury’s endurance. His human pity brought the tears to his eyes. He bent over the prostrate figures.

“I cannot grant your request even if I would. There can be no return for your son. You must go to him; he cannot come back to you. May my God, the God of love and mercy, help you!”

He turned and left the verandah. In another ten seconds the car was speeding down the road hidden in a column of golden dust in the bright morning sunshine.

* * * * *

The following morning, punctual to the minute, Ananda, accompanied by the Principal, entered the class room where he was to instruct twenty-seven boys whose ages ranged between twelve and fourteen. He had already received his instructions, and was relieved to find that nothing was required of him in the teaching line otherwise than what he was easily able to perform.

The class had assembled and most of the boys were studying the lesson that was to be repeated. There was a buzz of voices as each individual conned aloud the portion he had prepared. A few talked

together in low tones with a solemnity that would be strange in English schoolboys. Whether studying or chatting they all behaved quietly, with a total absence of trickery or exuberance of spirits. This self-contained orderliness, peculiar to native children in India, renders it possible for a teacher to manage a class of fifty pupils. Not only are the boys attentive, but many of them show an eagerness to learn which is surprising to the English master.

There was a sudden breathless hush as Wenaston entered; and twenty-seven pairs of eyes were fixed in rounded wonder upon the new teacher. He was recognised by most of the boys. Many of them belonged to families known to his own people.

He took his seat at the desk and began the lesson. Wenaston, after listening a few minutes, nodded his head in approval and left the room. His own class of young men preparing for one of the higher examinations was waiting for him.

At twelve o'clock the classes broke up and the boys went home to the midday meal. It was customary to reassemble at half-past one for games in the playing-field and begin work again an hour later.

After lunch Wenaston put on his sun-topee and strolled into the cricket-field. A few boys stood about in couples idly talking, but no game was in progress. He called to one of the big boys and asked why there was no practice at the nets. The reply was to the effect that most of the boys were leaving at once for home

where their presence was required by their families, without waiting for afternoon school.

Wenaston was accustomed to the absence of his pupils on the occasion of domestic ceremonial ; but it was usual to let him know beforehand. The reason was sometimes stated but not always. He passed on to his private sitting-room in the college where he had papers to look over. At three he went to the hall. His class was small ; so also were the classes of the other masters. At half-past five the bell rang and the boys dispersed. He met Ananda outside the building.

“ Come in and see Miss Wenaston,” he said. “ How did you get on this afternoon ? ”

“ Very well, indeed, sir, as far as my subject was concerned. It is a great pleasure to go over the old ground again and renew my acquaintance with it. I had very few boys this afternoon ; only ten out of the twenty-seven turned up.”

“ There must be some public festival going on ; for the other classes were also small. Do you know what it is ? ”

“ Not a regular feast day, I am sure. If there is anything of the kind it will be of a private nature : a wedding or a funeral. I am in Coventry as you know, sir ; and so I hear no news whatever.”

“ I hope you will not have to remain long in that uncomfortable position. You must establish yourself in a house of your own.”

“ I intend to do so as soon as I can consult with my

wife. Up to the present I have not been allowed to see either her or the child."

"You will not leave without them?"

"No; they must come with me. As long as I remain in the house I have a better chance of obtaining an interview."

They found Eola in the garden looking at the roses. Her favourites were all back in their places, a dozen beautiful *La France* plants. Whether they were the originals she could not say. The pruning was always a severe process that deprived the bushes of individual features and made them all of one pattern. Mrs. Hulver was not far off; and the gardener, beaming with satisfaction at the thought that his full wages were assured, was half concealed behind a bank of ferns where he was pretending to be very busy picking off dead leaves. Eola greeted Ananda with a friendly welcome that set him at ease; talked of her roses and other matters of no importance.

"I want to thank you, Miss Wenaston, for all that you sent yesterday by Mr. Alderbury," he said.

"You must thank my housekeeper. It was her thought. Mrs. Hulver! Mr. Ananda is very grateful to you for thinking of him in his need."

Mrs. Hulver, thus encouraged, approached and cast her shrewd grey eyes over the visitor. His neat European dress and manner met with her approval.

"I am glad the food was acceptable. I saw to the cooking of it myself. Mr. Alderbury told me that you

had been obliged to live on biscuits—poor stuff for young stomachs. What a man wants is a hot meal once a day. There should be meat as well as bread or rice. I wasn't able to send you any meat, Mr. Ananda."

"I don't eat meat, so it was all right."

"Do you like fish?"

"Yes; and vegetables curried; but I have not tasted a curry since I landed."

"Then you've gone to bed hungry more often than not in spite of your biscuits. As William—that was my second husband—used to say: 'Sharp stomachs make short tempers.' The best temper will sour under starvation."

A little later Ananda said good-bye and walked back to his father's house. On the way he met Bopaul. Mayita was his companion. Regardless of ill omens the brother had renewed his friendship with his sister; he took her for daily walks, avoiding the places where men and women congregated.

"Not afraid of being contaminated by the company of an outcaste?" said Ananda with some bitterness, as Bopaul turned to stroll part of the way with his friend.

"No; nor of being overshadowed by the widow," replied Bopaul with a light laugh. "How are things going with you?"

Ananda related the experience of the last week and his employment at the college, together with his plans for the future.

"You will certainly have to clear out of your father's house as soon as you can if you want any comfort."

“ I shall not go without my wife and child,” said Ananda, with the old obstinacy.

“ How is the child ? ” inquired Bopaul.

“ The child ! Is it ill that you ask ? ” said Ananda, startled.

“ It had a fall the day you returned. No effect was seen at first but a few days ago it complained of pain ; and my mother, who went to see it, thought that it was ill, though not very bad. Haven’t they told you ? ”

“ I hear nothing and I see nobody but the sweeper. Bring me news if there is anything important to tell,” said Ananda, trying in vain to hide the sudden anxiety that sprang up as he heard that the child was not well.

“ I will,” answered Bopaul, with a note of sympathy in his voice.

He stopped to turn back towards his own house, and Ananda passed on with downcast troubled eyes that failed to see how his friend stood watching him.

“ Poor fellow ! ” thought Bopaul. “ They are making it very hard for him ; but it is only what he might have expected. There is more grit and endurance in him than I expected. I thought he would have given in by this time. Pantulu Iyer’s brother has met his match, and he won’t step into Ananda’s shoes quite as easily as he thought.”

The following morning Ananda arrived at the college, and was in his place punctually to the strike of the clock. The bell rang but without response. A strange silence prevailed in the college close, in the hall and in the class

rooms. Not a boy was visible. The masters were in their places and the Principal in cap and gown on the platform ready to begin his lecture. He waited a short time and then went to the Vice-principal's room, a native who had taken a good degree at Cambridge.

"Where are all the boys?" asked Wenaston, in some bewilderment. "Is it a public festival?"

The Vice-principal paused before replying.

"I am afraid, sir, that they are purposely absenting themselves," he said, reluctantly. He had a great regard for his chief, and it went against the grain to say anything that might give him pain.

"Can you tell me the reason?"

"Because you have appointed the son of Pantulu Iyer as a master in the school."

"Does the feeling run so strongly against him that they can carry it to this pitch?" replied Wenaston in some indignation. "It is no concern of theirs what religion he professes. His opinions are a personal matter as long as he keeps them to himself. Did he mention the subject to his class yesterday?"

"No, sir," the Vice-principal answered promptly.

"Then it is outrageous that he should be ostracised in this manner."

Wenaston had been haunted by the dread of something of the kind ever since he had acceded to Alderbury's request; but he had not anticipated that it would come so soon, nor in such a practical form as a strike. The utmost he had expected was an inquiry on the part

of the Government authorities, followed by a recommendation that the appointment should be cancelled.

“The sympathy in the town is all on the side of Ananda’s parents. You hardly realise, sir, what an appalling disaster it is for a high caste Hindu to lose a son in this way,” remarked Wenaston’s colleague.

“You talk of him as if he were dead !”

“It would have been less of a disaster if he had died in the Hindu faith before he became a Christian.”

There was a pause. The Principal was troubled and perplexed. If the animosity towards Ananda was roused to such an extent as to produce these results something must be done and done promptly.

“If the feeling runs so high, I am afraid I shall be compelled to dispense with his services. I shall be sorry to part with him for his own sake ; I could see that he would have suited admirably as a master ; his teaching is clear and lucid. But I can’t have the school emptied in this way. You must help me to get out notices at once which will make it plain to the parents of the boys that the matter will be set right and another man will take the class.”

Dr. Wenaston had the unpleasant task before him of breaking the news to Ananda and of warning him that he must not be seen on the school premises again. There was no objection to an occasional visit to the house. Miss Wenaston would be pleased to see him at any time ; but he must be careful to keep away from the class rooms and playing-fields.

Ananda received the news in silence. The sight of the empty rooms was enlightening and needed no comment. He was not surprised when Dr. Wenaston intimated in polite and gentle speech that he could no longer permit him to appear in the college.

"I had better leave at once, sir ; as soon as the boys know that I am not here they will return," was Ananda's reply.

"You understand the situation ?"

"Quite ; the absence of the boys is convincing."

His dejection touched the Englishman. "I am sorry, very sorry for you. We must see what can be done in some other way. I will write to Mr. Alderbury at once."

Ananda turned his back on the silent rooms and walked towards the road. The residence of the Principal stood on his left fronting the other way. Mrs. Hulver was in the back verandah, her eye scanning the landscape. She called sharply to the butler.

"Ramachetty, go and tell that native gentleman over there that I want to speak to him."

Ananda, surprised at the summons, responded to her call.

"Come in, Mr. Ananda ; I want a few words with you," was her greeting.

Mrs. Hulver bustled into her sitting-room, followed by her visitor.

"Sit down," she said, in her expansive maternal manner. "I have something to tell you. Do you know

that those imps of boys who ought to be in class are waiting outside about a hundred yards up the road ? ”

“ Are they, Mrs. Hulver ? What do they want ? ”

Although he asked the question he was able to give a shrewd guess as to the reason of their presence.

“ They want you ; and they mean mischief. You must just sit here for a while, and when the coast is clear you can get away safely. I was in the town this morning. I tell you it is in a ferment over your coming to the college, and it isn’t safe for you to be seen about in broad daylight. Those young limbs of mischief mean to do you some hurt.”

This was the work of his uncle, he was convinced ; but he did not express his thoughts aloud. He thanked Mrs. Hulver for her kindly offices and sat down to wait. She gave him a book to read, and did her best to make him feel at ease.

“ You stay and dine with me. A good hot square meal will do you no harm. It will be cooked by myself in the verandah and it will be ready soon after twelve—hot soup, fried fish, vegetable curry and stewed guavas ; and we will eat it here in this room. As William—that was my first husband—used to say : ‘ Better be in at the end of a feast than the beginning of a fight—and a losing fight it will be for you, Mr. Ananda, if you get among those boys in their present temper.’ ”

CHAPTER XIV

A SURPRISE was in store for Mrs. Hulver the next morning in the shape of a telegram from her son. He had arrived at Bangalore, and he proposed taking three days' leave to pay his mother a visit at once. Her head was fairly turned with delight, and she hurried off to tell the good news to her young mistress. She thrust the telegram into Eola's hand.

"Read it, miss. You will have to go through it two or three times before you can take it all in; at least, I had to do so; but then I'm flurried; and as William—that was my second—used to say: 'Flurry never fires straight!'"

"Can we manage to put him up?" asked Eola, wondering whether she ought to offer her pretty spare room to the young corporal.

"Quite easily, miss. A camp bed in my sitting-room will do nicely."

"Are you sure that you would not like the spare room for him——"

Mrs. Hulver interrupted her with a gesture of horror.

"A common soldier in the spare room, miss! and the room just done up, too! No, indeed! A missionary

may use it if he is a friend of the house; but Dr. Wenaston should not stoop any lower. With the new curtains and carpet the room is fit for the Governor himself. As William—that was my third—used to say: ‘The finest trappings in the world don’t alter the breed of a horse.’ My son may look very smart in his corporal’s uniform, but for all that he’s only the son of a man in the ranks.”

Eola’s delicate sense of hospitality was not satisfied. With the spare room empty she felt that the door should not be shut against an Englishman, whose character was perfectly respectable, but whose rank differed from her own.

“If it is inconvenient to you to have him in the sitting-room, I should be very pleased to let him use the spare room,” she said.

Mrs. Hulver drew herself up with pride. “I know my place, miss,” she replied, severely, as much as to say: “and you ought to know yours.” She continued: “Even if I could bring myself to let him use the spare room, I should know all the time that it would not be good for him. As William—that was my first—used to say: ‘Pride is a plant that needs neither water nor manure; it will grow fast enough by itself.’ My son William will make himself comfortable you may be sure; and his pride will not be fostered by the camp bed, for it’s a little rickety, to say nothing of being a bit hard. My sitting-room will be like a palace to the boy after the barracks. I’m not sure that I ought to let him sleep there.”

“Where else could you put him?” asked Eola in wonder, for she knew the limitations of the house.

“In a corner of the back verandah,” replied Mrs. Hulver promptly. “It would be very convenient to have him there.”

“The night wind might give him fever.”

“That’s true, miss. As William—that was my third—used to say, when I rated him for leaning a little too far towards his failing: ‘Conveniences have their inconveniences and comforts their crosses.’ Well, you mustn’t keep me here gossiping or I shan’t be ready for young William when he arrives. He’s due at three o’clock this very afternoon.”

She bustled away, too full of William the second, junior, to note the smile with which Eola received the intimation that it was she who was detaining Mrs. Hulver.

At twelve o’clock Wenaston came in. He was earlier than usual. As a rule he did not appear till the lunch bell rang at one. Eola seated in the verandah looked up as she heard his step.

“Well? What’s the news? How are things going?” she asked.

“Badly! very badly! Only a quarter of the boys returned this morning. It will take a week or ten days to regain their confidence, and the loss of time will have an effect on my results. I would not have believed that so much feeling could have existed over the matter had I not seen its consequences.”

“ Did you hear how he got home yesterday ? ”

“ Not without accident. You know, perhaps, that he came here after leaving college at Mrs. Hulver’s invitation.”

“ She told me that he had lunched with her,” Eola replied. “ I was glad to think that the poor fellow had had a good midday dinner. She said that it was the first hot meal he had eaten since he left the boat at Bombay.”

“ It wasn’t to give him food that she asked him in. She heard through the servants that a party of the boys were lying in wait to rough-handle him on his way home ; and this was her way of preventing mischief.”

“ I wonder they dared to think of such a thing ! ” said Eola, with some indignation.

“ They not only thought of it but they nearly succeeded in carrying out their design. Ananda left Mrs. Hulver’s room in the afternoon, she having made sure that the boys were tired of waiting and had dispersed. At her advice he did not take the direct road home, but went round by a path not often used. Near his house he was obliged to walk along the road and as bad luck would have it, he met two of my boys—men they might more properly be called. They rushed at him with their sticks. He sprinted for home and escaped with a cut or two over the head.”

“ Of course he will prosecute the boys for assault,” said Eola.

“ He would do so if this were British territory ; but

being a native state, he, as a Christian, has no civil rights, no standing in a court of law. He can gain no redress ; he hasn't even the power to bind them over to keep the peace."

"Have you written to Mr. Alderbury ?"

"I wrote yesterday morning, and I have just had his reply by wire. He wants me to send Ananda to him at once. He has an opening for him and can find him employment before long. Meanwhile he will be glad to have him as his guest at the mission bungalow."

"You must see Ananda and tell him so ; it will be a little consolation for the poor fellow, perhaps."

"There's just my difficulty," replied Wenaston in perplexity. "It isn't safe for him to show his face outside his father's premises."

"They are not ill-treating him inside the house, I hope," said Eola, with sudden anxiety.

"Nothing beyond humiliating him as much as possible by giving him the services of a sweeper, and cutting off the supplies of food. If it goes no further I don't think any bodily harm can happen to him as long as he stays at home."

"Mr. Alderbury must come and advise him."

"He says in his wire that he can't pay us another visit just yet. We must do our best without him. I ought to go to Ananda's house, I suppose, since he can't come to me."

"It won't take you long ; not more than five minutes to get to the house if you go in the car."

"It isn't the time I am thinking of but the welfare of the college and my covenant with the Maharajah. I undertook not to meddle in any religious matters."

Eola laid her hand on her brother's arm. "Leave it to me," she said, "I will undertake to let Ananda know. Keep clear of the affair and get your pupils back as quickly as you can."

"You ought not to go to Pantulu's house," he rejoined quickly, as his eyes rested on her in doubt. "I don't know what sort of a reception you will get. You must not run any risk of rousing unpleasantness that I could not overlook."

"I promise you I will not run any risk nor get myself into trouble. I can manage, I think, to have your message delivered without going myself to Ananda's house. Will you tell me exactly what it is?"

"I have no other instructions than what are contained in the telegram. I shall have a letter to-morrow giving me more particulars. Meanwhile Ananda should be privately warned that he must be ready to leave not later than to-morrow evening by the night mail."

"Shall we lend him the car?"

"There again the difficulty occurs of assistance being rendered by me to an out-caste member of an important caste family, a member who is under the ban of the family's displeasure. No; he had better go by rail. The native chauffeur would sell the secret for a couple of rupees. I can't drive him myself; I haven't the time, and it would be risky."

“Mr. Alderbury will have to come and take Ananda away himself,” said Eola, unconsciously ready to believe that a visit was necessary.

“If so he must not do it from this house,” said Wenaston decisively. “But before anything can be settled as to ways and means, we must communicate with Ananda and find out what his wishes are.”

“The simplest way is to write a letter.”

“But it would be difficult to deliver it. It would never reach his hand.”

Wenaston lunched and returned to the college. The boys were assembled in the playing-field, and his spirits revived somewhat when he noted that at the summons of the bell they entered the class rooms in greater numbers than in the morning. He had an interview with the Vice-principal before afternoon school began. At four o'clock he came into the verandah for tea.

“Have you done anything about communicating with Ananda?” he asked of Eola.

“Nothing beyond writing him a letter.”

“Impossible to get it conveyed to him!” he exclaimed. “You mustn't go any further with the business. I have been talking to Rama Krishna, my Vice, and he implores me to remain strictly neutral for the sake of the school if for nothing else. He says that if I intend to help Ananda I may be able to do so later; but that at present I must be rigidly neutral.”

“It seems rather hard not to lend a helping hand,” said Eola, whose pity was roused. “I can't quite

reconcile my conscience to a course of total inaction. Whatever the Vice may say—and he is a heathen—we ought not to withhold any assistance that may be in our power to give him.”

“ Rama Krishna assures me again and again that I can best help Ananda by remaining neutral. I shall only provoke the town as well as the family to open hostilities.”

“ Does he show any animosity towards Ananda ? ”

“ None whatever. His life at the English University taught him tolerance. He recommends me to get the boys back at all costs as soon as possible. A mission agent like Alderbury is the right person to give the help required, and it is unfortunate that he cannot come just now. He argues that the missionary is paid to make converts and to help them ; and the natives recognise the fact. Because he is paid to proselytise, they are ready to tolerate more from him than from an unpaid agent. It is equally well known that I am paid to teach and not to proselytise. This is a country that expects nothing more from a man than what he is paid for. Anything done in excess of the purchased duty must have, in public opinion, some hidden motive.”

“ Can't people understand that your motive in helping Ananda is a religious one ? ”

“ No ; and it seems impossible to convince them otherwise. Even the Vice, though he knows me so well, had a suspicion that there was a mercenary motive underlying my desire to assist Ananda. He suspected

that I was working for a reward from Alderbury or for a bribe from the family. I think he inclined to the latter theory; but he was careful to hide his suspicions as they were not complimentary to me."

"I hope you undeceived him."

"I pretended not to see which way his thoughts leaned. What have you done with your letter?"

"I gave it to Mrs. Hulver. I explained the case to her, thinking she might contrive to have it conveyed somehow to Ananda without discovery."

Wenaston rose at once. "It won't do," he said. "There must be no communication between this house and Ananda's. I'll see Mrs. Hulver myself and tell her my wishes. She must understand definitely what they are."

He passed through the house towards the back verandah into which Mrs. Hulver's room opened.

"Poor Ananda!" thought Eola. "Will he have the courage to hold out? I am afraid my courage would melt away before such a fire of persecution as he seems to be meeting."

Wenaston presented himself at the door of Mrs. Hulver's sitting room. She met him with a broad smile of pleasure. Just behind her stood a man in uniform, the mother's smile reflected on his face.

"This is William, my son, sir. He has just arrived from Bangalore. He's the very image of his father. Stand forward and let Dr. Wenaston look at you."

She pushed the shy awkward young soldier forward.

He stood at attention as if confronting his colonel and lifted his hand in a military salute.

“Very glad to see you, Smith. So he is like his father is he?” he said.

“They are as like as two peas, sir, in every respect but one. My son takes after his grandmother on my side in his complexion. He is darker than his father, who was very fair. But as William—that was my first—used to say if any one remarked on his being dark: ‘Human blood is all of one colour no matter what sort of a skin may cover it.’”

“I hope you had a good voyage out,” said the Principal. “Sit down, Smith, I have come to speak to your mother. Mrs. Hulver, Miss Wenaston entrusted you with a letter to deliver to Mr. Ananda. Will you kindly give it back to me.”

Mrs. Hulver produced the letter and handed it to Wenaston, glancing at him with a natural curiosity which brought forth an explanation.

“You learned from Miss Wenaston what this letter contained?”

“Yes, sir; it was to show Mr. Ananda a way out of his troubles. He has got himself into rather a tight corner. As William—that was my second—used to say: ‘Think twice before you tie a knot that you can’t undo.’”

“I want you to understand my position fully, Mrs. Hulver. I am not able, I am sorry to say, to give Mr. Ananda any protection from the towns-people nor from

his family. Assistance on my part would be looked upon as a breaking of my covenant with the Maharajah when he sanctioned my appointment to the college. I hope that you will be careful not to do anything which will compromise me in this matter."

"You may rely on me, sir, for not burning my own fingers nor setting your house on fire by meddling with other people's candles. I am sorry for the poor young man, but after all he has brought it on himself. As William—that was my third—used to say (he was the one who changed his religion to marry me): 'If you sow brambles you must expect to tread on thorns.' Mr. Ananda told me all about himself as he sat here waiting till those young imps of budmashes had gone home. I heard in the bazaar this morning that he had been set upon near his own house; but he managed to get in without being much hurt."

"Yes; that was so. You pick up all the news in the market."

"Yes, sir," replied Mrs. Hulver complacently. She prided herself on possessing an accurate knowledge of the daily events of the town and Ramachetty was well aware that one of the roads to her favour was by way of the gossip that was reliable. Woe betide the unfortunate servant, however, who carried false news!

"What do they say in the town about the school?" asked Wenaston.

"That the boys will all be back by the end of the week. Don't you worry, sir, over those little budmashes.

The school is known to be the best in the State under your superintendence. You have no need to run after pupils. They will run after you if you bide your time. As William—that was my third—used to say when I went into the garden to call him in to dinner: ‘No occasion for the cook to hunt up the hungry; they won’t fail to be where the food is when they’re empty.’”

“Anyway I must be careful to see that nothing is done to give offence to the parents of the boys,” said Wenaston, anxious to press home his orders.

“I understand, sir. We are to let Mr. Ananda alone. It shall be as you wish, of course. I pity him, I’m sure; but all the same, I would rather not be mixed up with his change of religion. It’s turning out a bigger job than he thought. As William—that was my second—used to say: ‘When a man bites off a bigger bit than he can chew, he can’t look for any assistance from other men’s teeth.’”

The school bell rang and Wenaston, punctuality itself, turned away to obey its call. Mrs. Hulver hastened to add her last word which, as usual, was the reflected wisdom of one of the departed.

“As William—that was my third—used to say after I had scolded him for leaning a little too far over towards his weakness: ‘A stormy morning brings a clear evening, Maria, me dear, so perhaps your breath has not been wasted.’ Everything will come right in the end if you give it time.” Then, as Wenaston hurried away, she turned to her son. “William, you sit in the back

verandah whilst I change my dress. We'll take a walk in the town and look at the boutiques in the bazaar."

Twenty minutes later Mrs. Hulver issued from her bedroom a very different figure from the white clothed housekeeper, who with cook and butler behind her, went marketing in the morning. Even William, junior, who had just come from London, was impressed by the glossy purple silk that "stood by itself," the white lace scarf and floral bonnet; to say nothing of the odds and ends of glittering jewellery that adorned her ample bust.

Mother and son, in purple silk and scarlet uniform, presented a patch of colour on the green landscape that was arresting to the most careless eye. The sensation created in the town was considerable. It was a kind of triumphal progress. Being fluent in the native language she explained who the stranger was, introducing him to the merchants sitting behind their stalls and to the few Eurasians who lived in Chirapore.

Bopaul, sauntering along the street, was attracted by the sight of a British soldier, and stopped to inquire his name. Mrs. Hulver hastened to explain with maternal pride and returned the compliment by asking about the identity of the questioner. The sun touched the horizon before she thought of home.

"Time to be going back, William. As your father used to say: 'Keep time as if it was your best friend, and take care you don't kill it or waste it or lose it.'"

CHAPTER XV

EOLA sat with her brother after dinner as usual at the end of the verandah where there was shelter from the night air. Wenaston read, and Eola finding his society dull, retired early to her room. The servants had gone to their go-downs at the back of the compound to eat their evening meal. The cicalas whirled in the foliage of the oleanders, and a brown owl screamed in its shikaring flight over the roof of the house. Above the noises of the night was heard a step on the carriage drive.

Wenaston rose and went to the top of the verandah steps. Two men stood under the portico keeping in the shadow of the ornamental shrubs.

“Who is there ?” he asked in a low voice.

One of the visitors came forward into the light and Wenaston recognised Bopaul.

“Oh, it’s you, is it ?”

“Yes, sir ; I have brought Ananda. He wants to see you about Mr. Alderbury’s offer.”

Wenaston descended the steps and they retreated together out of reach of the lamp light.

“How did you hear of it ?” he asked in some surprise.

There was a slight pause and then Bopaul explained that he had heard of it and had told Ananda.

"From the telegraph clerk, I suppose," said Wenaston. "If he knows it the whole town knows it."

"Perhaps; but Ananda's people have not been told."

"So much the better; it will make it easier for you to get away," said Wenaston addressing Ananda.

"I have come to see you to-night, sir, to say that I have decided not to accept Mr. Alderbury's invitation. I shall be glad if you will write and tell him so. I have sent a letter which Bopaul posted for me; but it will be as well if you will add your word to mine."

Wenaston listened in surprise. He had concluded that the visit was made for the purpose of raising money for the journey. It had not crossed his mind that the invitation would be refused. He gazed at his visitors in the darkness as though he had not heard correctly.

"Are you wise to remain here after the hostile demonstration we have experienced in the college? I am afraid it won't end there."

"It would be cowardly to run away," said Ananda in a firm voice that betokened determination backed by courage. "I have reasons for remaining under my father's roof. I am attached to my parents and——" he hesitated for a moment and then added quickly, "and to my wife and child. If these two would come with me I would go to-morrow, or even to-night; but I won't leave Chirapore without them."

“I am not sure that you are acting wisely; though I can’t deny that it is courageous. You need not stay away for ever. You might return at any time. Popular antagonism will die down if you are not here to keep it alive; and your family might become more reconciled to the step you have taken.”

“They might; on the other hand they might consider me as dead; and then think of the fate of my wife.”

“They would regard her as a widow, you mean.”

“The case is exceptional and without precedent in Chirapore. They are more likely to consider the marriage annulled by my departure, and to give my wife to another man. That shall not be as long as I have an arm to protect her. She is mine; mine by right of past possession and she shall be mine in the future.”

Even Bopaul was impressed by the new attitude of his friend. The weakness had disappeared in a marvellous manner, and every trace of timidity had vanished.

“You might gain immediate possession of your wife if you would give up your new faith, and place yourself unreservedly in the hands of the guru and purohit,” remarked Bopaul probing the new found courage with curiosity.

Ananda turned on him.

“That I will never do. I may have to suffer for it. Others have suffered for their religious opinions before now. I will keep my faith and I will have my wife and child. My father may disinherit me but he cannot

deprive me of my son ; and where the son is the mother will follow."

" You have no power as a Christian over your child," said Wenaston, feeling that it would be wrong to leave him in ignorance of his true position. " The law of the State will not give you the custody of him."

" Who says so ? "

He named the native lawyer whom Alderbury had consulted.

" As long as you remain in the State of Chirakul you are in the position of an outlaw, deprived of your citizenship, your legal standing, your civil rights. As soon as you set foot in British India you resume your rights and can claim protection and justice in the courts of law belonging to the territory ; although of course you can't obtain redress against this State. Hadn't you better go where your rights will be respected and where you will have religious freedom ? "

" If things grow hopeless I might do so ; but at present I wish to remain here and show my parents that I have no intention of running away. On the contrary I am going to fight for my rights."

Again Bopaul's eyebrows were uplifted.

" Were you hurt, by the by, yesterday ? " asked Wenaston.

" Nothing to speak of. I had a nasty blow on my head ; but beyond a head ache I am none the worse, thank you, sir. We won't keep you any longer. I shall be glad if you will let Mr. Alderbury know that I

am grateful. At the same time make him understand that I have made up my mind to adopt this course, and that I am not likely to change. I think he will approve of my facing the situation instead of running away from it. And tell him also that I mean to fight for my wife and child."

Wenaston turned back into the verandah and took up his book; but his attention wandered, and a little later he gave up attempting to read. As he extinguished the lamp he said to himself; "I wonder how much endurance the man has; and how much he will require to carry him through his troubles. Where would the Christianity of some of us be if we were outlawed; and bashed on the head; and deprived of our wives and children?"

After bidding Dr. Wenaston good night Bopaul and his companion walked home by unfrequented paths to avoid chance pedestrians. There was not much danger of molestation unless Ananda deliberately put himself in the way of it. No concerted action was likely to be taken at present; and his prompt disappearance from the college went far to allay the irritation that had sprung up so suddenly among the students.

The two friends parted in silence except for a few whispered words from Bopaul to the effect that he would look him up on the morrow.

Bopaul's attitude towards his friend was curious. He had no sympathy with his conversion to Christianity. He regarded the action as inexpedient and bordering

on foolishness. His opinion was that it had been carried out in haste, and without due consideration of all the different issues involved.

His friendship with Ananda was of long standing, dating from early childhood, and the two men were attached to each other by ties of affection that could not be easily broken. It grieved Bopaul to see his friend living in discomfort, and he was ready as far as he was able to render any little service that might be within his power. The English training had fostered an independence of thought with tolerance for the opinions of others ; and it showed its effects in Bopaul's character. He took an independent line of action with regard to his friend as well as his sister. According to the unwritten law of caste the widow and the outlaw should have been ruthlessly thrust from his life. Instead of abandoning them to their fate he maintained a brotherly love for one and a friendly affection for the other.

Of the two Ananda interested him the more. He found himself studying the development of his friend's character under the fire of adversity. Obstinacy had already given birth to courage, and courage was breeding patience. Ananda's refusal to take flight roused his admiration. The firmly expressed determination to gain possession of his wife and child appealed to the romance that is inherent in all human beings, and of which Bopaul had a full share. In addition curiosity as to how the affair would end helped to retain his attention and interest.

Bopaul continued his habit of taking Mayita for a walk every day. This daily outing, sometimes in the morning, sometimes in the evening, was the breath of life to the girl. She lived for it; it was the one ray of veritable sunshine that entered her darkened life. Perhaps it was the knowledge of this fact that made the brother sacrifice everything else to the little daily act of charity.

They were a strange couple, the brother and sister; and more than one pair of inquisitive eyes looked after them as they strolled towards the forest. At first his mother shook her head over the arrangement. She even went so far as to try and stop it by setting Mayita tasks that would keep her occupied when her brother called for her to come. Bopaul with his casual manner, that was none the less insistent for all its apparent indifference, over-ruled his mother by seeking out Mayita and carrying her away from her unfinished work regardless of her protests.

"Let be, wife; and trouble not yourself. You need have no fear that our son will offend against the laws of caste," said his father.

"It is not that which I fear; it is the bad luck the widow may bring upon him," returned the anxious mother.

"Many men who have travelled have learned to disregard our omens. As long as the boy doesn't follow in Ananda's steps I am content."

"He is not likely to do that if we may believe the

guru. The swami was satisfied that his faith in our gods was not shaken."

"If it had been shaken he would not have performed all the ceremonies that were necessary on his return. Be content and let the boy go which way he pleases. A little liberty in the field will keep the bullock from straying into the forest where the tiger lies."

Bopaul's mother was of too indolent a disposition to seek unnecessary trouble. Having spoken to her husband she rested in the comfortable assurance that responsibility was shifted on to his shoulders. She put no more obstacles in the way of the walks, and they were continued to Bopaul's satisfaction and the girl's intense delight.

She was in her fourteenth year, but she looked older. During the last few months she had lost all trace of childishness and had matured like most Hindu girls of that age.

As they walked, Mayita's hand in his, he told her of that wonderful country in the west where he had lived for more than three years among white people; where there was no caste; where widows after two years of mourning dressed themselves like other women with gold and jewels, and married again if they chose. She interrupted him to express her horror of such depravity on the part of widows in any country civilised or savage. She herself would sink into the earth with shame if she were asked to pursue such an outrageous course. He described the life on board the big ship; the wide blue

water with no land visible ; the storm and tumbling waves with their white crests. Then he took her in imagination to Bombay where the pictures he drew were easier to realise ; and he told her of the crowded streets, the tall houses and the magnificent carriages of the Governor and native princes.

Now and then they stopped. Bopaul seated himself upon a boulder or a fallen tree and read a book. Mayita gathered flowers, and had it not been for her sad condition the sweet blossoms would have been pushed into the strands of her hair ; but the luxuriant black locks were gone and the bare shaven pate in its widowed condition offered no temptation for floral adornment.

Sometimes she played a little game by herself with sticks and stones and leaves to represent the feast at which she would never again be present. She bade the imaginary guests welcome and served them with make-believe dainties. She paid them compliments and dismissed them with gifts of attar of rose and pan-supari, as she had seen her mother treat her real guests in the old days before Coomara died.

Then Bopaul would close his book and call to her to come home. On their way they sometimes stopped at Pantulu's house ; and Bopaul leaving her under the trees by the compound wall sought Ananda in his little room. The solitary man responded eagerly, and joined his friend with an alacrity that showed how the little act of kindness was appreciated. They paced to and fro at the end of the compound furthest from the house,

till it was time for Mayita to return once more to the women's quarters of her father's house.

No one interfered to stop the intercourse. If Bopaul liked to seek out his friend, he was welcome to do so ; and if he brought his widowed sister with him there was no one to say him nay. He was at liberty to please himself ; but to those who happened to observe the trio it seemed a strange way of amusing himself, to choose a widow as his companion and to visit an out-caste.

Unknown to Ananda one of the most interested watchers of his movements was Dorama his wife. Hidden from all eyes she gazed through the chink of a shutter at the familiar figure in the distance. The boyishness was gone ; it was the form of a man, a strong well-set-up man who would find favour with any woman. In spite of all that had happened he was still her husband. The thought thrilled her with a strange restlessness and longing. It was very hard—it was almost unbearable to be separated thus. Did he yearn for her as she yearned for him ? He could not or he would break down every barrier and come to her. He would submit to the ceremonies for the restoration of his caste. He would obey every order given by guru or purohit. He would allow nothing, nothing !—nothing !—to stand between them and keep them apart.

The tears coursed down her cheeks in anger and disappointment. At one moment she could have scratched and bitten him for the contumacy that was costing her

so much misery ; at another she could have devoured him with passionate kisses.

Meanwhile all unconscious of the secret watcher Bopaul and Ananda talked. They spoke in English mindful of listening ears. A little cross-examining of Mayita would elicit all she knew of what passed in conversation. It was best for those concerned that there should be no tale-bearing.

“ You don’t realise the greatness of your old faith,” Bopaul was saying as they strolled under the shade of the trees that bordered the compound.

“ How can it be great when it fails to satisfy ? ” objected Ananda.

“ First let me show you that Hinduism is great by the light of its past history,” said Bopaul eagerly.

He plunged into much the same story as Alderbury had told Eola. He described the antiquity of Hinduism ; its marvellous organisation ; its power of absorbing the conquered races ; and he extolled the system of caste.

Ananda listened and at the conclusion he remarked, “ Caste and the power of the Brahman are being already undermined.”

“ In what way ? ”

“ We have apologists for their existence. If either were divine in origin there would be no necessity for an apology.”

“ I deny that the system of caste is being undermined. It may have overgrown itself and need pruning. Some of the senseless subdivisions should be broken up ; and we want reform in our marriage laws——”

His eyes sought the figure of his sister as she gathered some starry blue flowers growing among the rank grass.

“Even if the caste system were reformed,” objected Ananda, “and the greatness of Hinduism established in the world, there are certain tenets of its faith that seem to me impossible for an educated and enlightened man to accept.”

“Such as——?”

“Transmigration.”

“Ah, yes; I remember. That was the rock you split on.”

“I cannot accept the weary round of those cycles of rebirths.”

“You accept a cycle of existence of some sort?”

“Existence; life; immortality of the soul; yes.”

“Which implies existence prenatal and after physical death?”

“Certainly; Mr. Alderbury says that the germ of that idea lies hidden in most religions.”

“If you admit so much, why can’t you accept the transmigration theory? It accounts for all the suffering that exists. It is a retributive system of perfect justice. The pains you suffer now are due solely to your own actions in a previous embodiment; and your conduct now will predetermine your pleasure and pain in your next incarnation. To me it is an acceptable theory relieving one of an enormous responsibility.”

“If you really believe such a theory in its entirety, why do you attempt to give that child pleasure?”

Bopaul laughed but made no reply, and Ananda continued :

“ The hopeless retributive character of the theory of transmigration seems to militate against our faith in the transcendence of God. The system imposes limits not consistent with His Infinitude. Transmigration may seem just and right from a human point of view ; but it is too full of tragedy to be seriously regarded as the deliberate work of an unlimited Deity.”

“ It does away with injustice,” persisted Bopaul.

“ And grinds existence down to a mechanism,” added Ananda. “ Christianity gives something infinitely superior—a good and perfect God. The knowledge of this Deity has come to us through Jesus Christ. He has shown us not a retributive mechanical Deity, but a great and wonderful Father who deals with us better than we deserve. Though men may by their freedom of choice choose what ought to bring them to ruin, the desire of God expressed through Christ, the great teacher, is to save them from the consequences of their actions.”

“ What good can pain and suffering do if it is not a mill of retribution ? ”

“ It is an education and a discipline in the government of self. I speak personally for I have felt my position in my father’s house more than a little. You may not see any change in my character, but I know that my views on the brotherhood of man and the Fatherhood of God have altered. I don’t mind

confessing that my attitude towards the pariah who acted as my servant by my parents' orders has modified. They thought to humiliate me, but they have taught me a lesson. I recognise his humanity and his good qualities."

"Yet you can't take the food he brings you ?"

"No, I can't ; to my shame be it said ; for it distresses him to see me starve. There's a wide gulf between theory and practice in his case, and for the present I prefer to starve."

"Poor, weak, human nature !" said Bopaul with a laugh in which Ananda joined, although the subject was no laughing matter.

"And if pain comes into the life of a child who is not old enough to have sinned ; how do you account for it ?" asked Bopaul returning to the charge.

"To reply in detail to this and similar objections would require a greater knowledge of the spiritual world than even the apostles themselves possessed. 'Now we see through a glass darkly,' said St. Paul. Later illumination will assuredly come. The curtain was partly lifted when Christ was born. At His second coming it will be entirely raised, and by that time our eyes will be strong enough to bear the light."

There was silence which Bopaul broke with another question.

"Does the missionary teach you that after death comes sleep ?"

"No ; there is no stagnation in the spiritual world

any more than there is in the material world. The souls of the departed are possessed of conscious memory, and they have a sense of pain and pleasure. I believe," he spoke solemnly and with shining eyes that seemed to look beyond the limit of the Hindu's mental vision, "that Coomara instead of being reborn as a dog or a reptile in this world has entered into new powers of vitality and energy in a spiritual world that far exceeds the limitations of this world. He lived a blameless life according to his lights, and he has entered into another life in which there will be progression and development. With his entry into that new life he will acquire new powers of comprehension. There will be a great movement forward in spirituality between his state here on earth and the new estate in the world he has entered. The step will be as great or greater than if a dog entered the human life and were endowed with human privileges."

"Excepting that he died under the ban of broken caste, Coomara was without faults," acquiesced Bopaul. "But I cannot disregard the teaching of the guru who says that because of that broken caste he must suffer."

"And I say in all honest hope," cried Ananda in ringing tones that caused the widow to glance at him in surprise. "I say that through the power of the Christian's Man-God, Jesus Christ, the Great All-Father in His mercy and love will receive Coomara to Himself, and preserve him from the fate you anticipate. I think upon his prospects almost with envy. There was a time when I could only shudder in terror at what

was promised by our faith ; but now I am satisfied that he is happy."

"The Hindu faith does not deny a progression towards a better state after death," said Bopaul.

"May be ; but it limits improvement to merit ; and the merit is made to depend not only upon the past deeds of the dead, but also upon the voluntary deeds of the living descendants of the dead. A neglect of the shraddah ceremonies by the grandchildren to the fourth generation condemns the soul to inferior rebirth. Those rites for the repose of the dead are monstrous in their assumption and ridiculous in their childish nature."

"All rites seem ridiculous and meaningless if you judge them by their action alone," said Bopaul.

"Yet you perform them slavishly," said Ananda turning on him.

Bopaul laughed as though he shook off all responsibility for the reason of his actions.

"I am what that Englishman called his friend, do you remember ? ' a blatant ritualist.' I love ceremonies. They give me a comfortable sense of having done my duty to the gods and to men. I feel as if I had got out of debt and was starting afresh with a clean page."

"Do you really believe in them ?" asked Ananda searching the face of the other in a vain endeavour to penetrate the superficial lightness with which Bopaul touched these matters.

"The purohit and the guru believe in them. My

father pins his faith to them, and I am content to take their word for it."

"And I am not! To my mind the three great props of Hinduism are crumbling away in spite of your blind faith—transmigration, the immaculate authority of the Brahmans and their Vedas; and the caste system."

"Rank treason!" cried Bopaul roused at last into something approaching excitement. "It is as well that the guru doesn't hear you! Caste will never die; it will change its constitution and become more social than religious. The Vedas will have new exponents and the germs that lie hidden in them will be brought to light and understood. Transmigration will be modified with a new theory of progression in a life in other spheres under different conditions of corporality from the earthly life; and Hinduism reformed will be greater than ever."

"It can only be done through Christ," responded Ananda with the enthusiasm of the convert. "Christianity will develop all the germs that lie fallow in Hinduism and will throw light in the dark places. Why is the west to monopolise a revelation that was originally given to the east? Why is the west to appropriate to itself the emancipation and promises made by that revelation? We have a right to claim Christ for ourselves," he concluded. "I for one make that claim and no one shall deny me!"

Again there was silence. Then Bopaul, without any outward sign of excitement, remarked:

“Haste is an evil counsellor. You are asking for trouble and you will get it. Tell me, have you had a decent lodging or meal since you have been under your father’s roof ? ”

Ananda calmed down under the material inquiry after his bodily welfare, and he replied in a subdued voice :

“No, and I am not likely to get one as far as I can see unless, as I said, I accept it at the hands of the sweeper.”

“How do you exist ? ”

“I have some biscuits and I buy a draught of water from the caste waterman in the town. Mr. Alderbury very kindly brought me some food when he came to see me.”

“I can’t bring you any food I am sorry to say. My mother would consider it an unfriendly act towards your parents. How is your money lasting ? ”

“It is nearly finished.”

“And then ? ”

“I haven’t thought about it,” replied Ananda, a troubled expression overshadowing his face.

“I can lend you a little. I brought it to-day, a ten rupee note. It is all I have that I need not account for. I can get plenty from my father, but he takes good care to inform himself of how and where it goes. The note is in this envelope. Don’t let my sister see it ; she might tell my mother. Just slip it into your pocket as quickly as you can.”

He held out his hand to Mayita. "Come, little one, it is time we went home."

At the entrance to the compound Bopaul stopped.

"Take my advice and go to Mr. Alderbury," he said suddenly.

"Not without my wife."

"She will never join you."

"That remains to be proved," replied Ananda unconvinced.

"And remember that as a 'vert you have no conjugal rights," to which remark the other did not reply.

Dorama still furtively watching saw Ananda return slowly and enter the mean little yard into which his still meaner room opened. The smell of the curry prepared for the midday meal of the household met her nostrils.

"How does he continue to live and look so strong and handsome? He refuses to eat the food sent by the sweeper. Ah! it should be given by my hand, the hand of his wife. It is my right. Husband! come to me! In your need, your hunger, cannot you hear the voice of your wife calling!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE house of Pantulu Iyer was neither cheerful nor happy. The master himself had aged visibly since the arrival of his son. The signs were to be seen in the stooping figure and listless gait. He had grown thinner, and his appetite was failing. No matter how carefully the food was prepared he refused to eat, complaining sometimes that it was not palatable ; at other times he asked with a querulousness that was not habitual, how they could expect him to eat when he knew that his dearly loved son was starving.

All day long he sat and moped either in the verandah of the inner courtyard, or in the front room that opened by the big door on the carriage drive. The door was kept shut and he seldom passed beyond it. If a friend came to call he refused to see him ; and if any member of the family with the best intentions of amusing him attempted to talk to him, he dismissed him curtly.

His gloom had a depressing effect on his wife ; and for the sake of the household as well as her own she begged him to rouse himself. She suggested visits to his looms in the town and to his silk farms in the suburbs. The office books were brought, and at her direction his

younger brother read aloud the carefully-kept accounts, showing how the business had increased and how the prosperity of his ventures was assured ; but these and all other devices failed to rouse his interest. With the aptitude for fostering misery, a peculiarity of fatalism, he resigned himself to his circumstances and refused to make any struggle against what he believed to be the inevitable.

In addition to the anxiety caused by her husband's melancholia, Gunga was further disturbed by the state of her grandson's health. At the time when Dorama let him fall from her unconscious arms he had not shown any sign of having sustained any injury. Beyond a few bruises no serious harm was apparent. At the end of a week the child complained of pains in his back and hip. He lost his activity and his good spirits ; was disinclined to move and was always craving to be nursed by his mother or one of the women of the house.

A prompt examination of the hip and spine by a skilled surgeon might have discovered the mischief and given relief ; but skilled surgery was not obtainable from the native apothecary nor from the native doctor. A vaityan—as the Hindu medical man is called, a person without any scientific knowledge—was summoned, and he prescribed for fever. As the medicine failed to have any beneficial effect, he declared that the child was suffering from the effects of the glance of an evil eye. He must have come under its influence in some way unknown to his mother. Where had she carried him or led him ?

There was a searching back into memory for occasions when an evil eye might have rested upon him. Some one recalled the events of the day following Ananda's arrival home, how he appeared on the verandah in front of the open door and how the child ran towards him. It was also noted how the father of the boy had fixed his eye upon him with a great eagerness of possession.

The vaityan was more than satisfied that in the incident they had found a solution of the mystery. The unconscious longing awakened in the father at the sight of his child had given birth to a natural curse of the disappointment of his desire. If he could not have the child himself no one should have him. The baneful influence of the thought in the man's mind was working for evil in the boy's body.

This pronouncement did not tend to allay the irritation felt throughout the family against the son who had brought the shadow of sorrow upon his father's house.

The vaityan prescribed different medicine, and in addition recommended the performance of certain rites that were supposed to have the power of warding off spells. He solemnly tied an amulet specially prepared on the child's arm. The floor of the room where the boy slept was to be strewn with margosa leaves gathered fresh every day; and he was to drink the milk of a black goat that had not a single white hair.

The execution of these numerous orders served to occupy the time and attention of the women; at the

same time they kept alive the irritation against Ananda for being the cause of the trouble.

In the midst of it all the guru appeared accompanied by his disciple. He had come unexpectedly and without invitation to learn why the restitution rites were not performed. Reasonable delay he was prepared to permit ; but if there was a wilful deferring of the ceremonies it was his duty to exhort and persuade into speedy amendment.

The grave countenance of the swami struck terror into the hearts of the little company that hastily assembled to do him honour. Pantulu fell at his feet in a humble prostration ; and Gunga followed his example. As neither offered any explanation Pantulu's brother took upon himself the office of spokesman. He described all that had happened ; Ananda's conversion to Christianity in England ; the punishments that had been inflicted when it was found that he not only refused to recant, but also declined to take any part in the restitution ceremonies. The guru was told how he was lodged and served ; of the attempts that had been made to degrade him and starve him ; and how he had not been permitted to see either wife or child.

The great man listened in silence ; and when the story was ended the more timid ones of the little company trembled in apprehension of an outburst of anathema and general condemnation. It did not come. The expression on his face was severe but the words that fell from his lips sounded strangely mild and gentle.

“ We must look into this matter and see what can be done. Let the child be brought ; I am told that he is not well.”

Every one from Pantulu downwards was sensible of relief. The anxiety that weighed so heavily was lifted and placed temporarily upon stronger shoulders. Where they had failed in their methods the swami might succeed, and the heir of the house be restored to them. What a rejoicing and feasting there would be ! was the thought that ran through the minds of many of the women. The only person who differed in this attitude was Pantulu's brother. Slowly and insidiously he was stepping into the position rendered vacant by Ananda's apostacy to the faith of his fathers. The little Royan would inherit his grandfather's wealth, and during the long minority his great uncle would be practically master of the house and guardian of the person of the minor ; but in the event of the child's death Sooba would be the heir.

The drooping child with pathetic signs of pain in his pinched features was brought to the guru who examined him closely and confirmed the opinion of the vaityan. The boy, he said, was placed under the displeasure of the gods and was suffering for his father's sins. If he died—he shook his head solemnly, not thinking of the inheritance but of the future state. The company did not require to be told the fate of a child dying under such circumstances.

Then Pantulu in a trembling voice described his own

bodily failings, loss of appetite and sleep, weakness of limbs and an ebbing away of vitality that could only mean the approach of death.

Again the oracle assumed a severe expression. What could be expected but the withering and drooping of the parent when the son was so inhumanly wicked as to break away from his ancestral faith? He would consider what was best to be done, and consult with the brother of the sick man. Then the family offered up thanks and adoration, each member prostrating him or herself before the guru as he withdrew to the room assigned for his use. Sooba followed and the door was closed on the two men.

The interview lasted some time and advice was given that was virtually a command. Sooba would not divulge what it was until the moment arrived for action. Only to Gunga did he give a hint of what the great man intended to do; and she expressed her full approval.

“And if this should fail?” she asked with a sinking heart for she knew the strength of her son’s obstinacy.

Her brother-in-law lowered his voice and replied in a whisper. Her head was bent and she made no reply; but her lips closed firmly.

“You will not speak to my husband on this matter. He is too weak, too feeble to deal with it,” she said later.

“It will be best to keep him in ignorance—until the orders of the swami have been carried out,” answered Sooba. “I have your consent to act?”

“There is no other way of bringing him to reason;

and who am I to contradict and oppose one who speaks with the authority of the gods ? ” replied Gunga, sadly.

On the following morning, after Ananda had risen from his hard, uncomfortable bed and breakfasted on some hot milk and biscuits, he was surprised at receiving a visit from his uncle. The cup that had contained the milk had been replaced in the tiffin basket with the tin of biscuits, and no trace was discernible to the sharp eyes of the visitor of the simple morning meal.

In a more courteous tone than had been adopted by any member of the family hitherto, he asked Ananda to accompany him into the house. At first there was a very natural hesitation to obey such an unexpected summons ; but on second thoughts Ananda deemed it wiser to go than to refuse. For all he could tell it might be the first sign of relenting.

He closed the book he was reading, placed it upon the table, and without a word followed his uncle through the compound to the front of the house. Side by side they mounted the steps that led into the verandah. The big door stood open, and they passed through it into the entrance-room. Bidding him stay there his uncle left him for a few minutes.

The door leading into the centre courtyard was wide open, and through it he caught sight of some of the women of the household, as they moved in and out of the kitchen and its offices in the execution of their domestic duties. His eye sought eagerly for the familiar

figure of his wife or child, but no trace of them or of his parents was visible.

As he gazed into the sunlit yard memories crowded back upon him thickly. The place was full of associations connected with his childish games, the idle chatter of his boyhood, the visit of the guru and the purohit when they came to perform ceremonies that once were so full of awe and mystery ; and that now by the light of the new teaching seemed so futile and childish.

In the midst of his reverie his uncle reappeared, and leading him to a room signed to him to enter. He heard the door close behind him and knew that his companion had not followed.

Ananda scarcely dared to believe his eyes. In front of him stood Dorama, not a sad tearful repellent Dorama ; but a loving, expectant wife, happy and confident.

She was dressed as a bride in a rich silk saree. Her neck, arms and hair gleamed with gold and precious stones. Jasmine blossom peeped from the strands of her glossy hair. Her complexion was heightened by the subtle use of saffron, and there was an alluring scent of sandal wood in the air.

He strode towards her impetuously ; gathered her into his arms pressing passionate kisses upon her unresisting mouth. The thirst of his heart was not easily assuaged. He lost count of time ; his eyes were blind to everything but the beautiful woman who nestled against his breast with inarticulate murmurs of contentment. His pulses leaped as he realised that his kisses

were returned. She loved him ! She was his ! How the clouds parted and rolled aside at the assurance !

A hand was laid upon his shoulder with no light touch, and they were forced apart. Ananda turned angrily upon the intruder who dared to interpose and found himself face to face with the guru. Yielding in his surprise to the old instinctive habit of his youth he placed his hands together palm to palm.

“ Pardon, swami ; I did not know that you were present,” he said. “ I thought I was alone with my wife.”

For all his humility and deference there was a note of pride in his tone that jarred on the ear of the man who arrogated to himself the attributes of a god. The words seemed to imply that the third person present at such a meeting, whoever he might be, was an intruder ; and that the sooner he departed the better pleased the husband would be.

As for Dorama her head sank upon her breast in what appeared to be an overwhelming fit of outraged modesty. Inwardly she was glowing under that ardent embrace, tingling to her finger tips, every nerve thrilled by his possessive touch. She had been well tutored beforehand as to her conduct, how she was to do all in her power to attract her errant husband and draw him back to her ; how she was to appeal to him by words and tears and pray him to return. The programme thus mapped out for her did not include the unexpected greeting, and she felt confused. Ananda had begun at the wrong end and cut the ground on which she was

to base her pleading from beneath her feet. She drew aside leaving the swami to speak.

“ I have arranged for you to see your wife and speak with her. She is also to hear what I have to say to you. I understand that you have refused the rites that should restore your caste—— ”

“ I have become a Christian and I have received the Christian rite of baptism. Under those circumstances the Hindu rites are unnecessary,” interrupted Ananda, careful to preserve the courtesy rendered instinctively by a man of good caste to an equal.

“ It matters not what you call yourself,” replied his former spiritual teacher with a lowering glance ; “ nor does it signify in the least what strange ceremonies you may have seen fit to go through in England. They can all be cast aside like the blanket clothing you were obliged to adopt when the frost and snow came. The delayed rites must be performed, and I am here to see that they are properly carried out.”

The guru restrained himself with difficulty. Ananda’s independent attitude and simple courage roused his anger. The great man could not fail to observe that he had very little hold on the attention of his hearers. Already Ananda was turning impatiently to the woman as though he had disposed of the intruder and swept him off his horizon by the announcement of his change of faith.

“ Wife, where is the child, our child ? My eyes ache for a sight of him ! ”

“ He is not well.”

“Not well ? How is that ?” he asked with parental concern that sounded sweet to her unaccustomed ears.

“He pines for his father,” she replied falteringly.

“Tell him how he has laid a curse not only on the child but also on his parents,” broke in the swami unable to keep silence. “The curse will extend to his wife as well, if she fails to draw him back from his evil ways.”

She looked from one to the other, trembling under the stern eye of the swami.

“Husband will you not return to us ? The big father pines for a sight of his son. The old eyes are blind through tears. The child——!” she stopped unable to command her voice. “Husband !” she continued. “Your wife more than all pines also. The day is long and weary without you. The night is unbearable in its misery. Will you not come to us, our lord and master ?”

She held out her arms, and again he would have clasped her to himself ; but in accordance with instructions given by no less a person than the swami himself she drew back ; and the guru by a slight movement glided in between them.

“The reward is ready and waits with impatience,” said the swami, his lips parting for a moment and showing the white teeth in a smile that was not born of kindness or pity. “But you are not ready for the reward.”

Ananda ignored the speech and continued to address Dorama with increasing emotion.

“Come ? Will I not come ? Beloved, I will come ! I am ready ; I have been waiting till my heart was sick with longing. Wife ! ” he cried passionately, “ I claim you as my own unconditionally. I command you to join me. Come willingly if you can ; but willing or unwilling I shall not cease trying to regain my rights.”

“ You have no rights ! ” cried the guru, a definite challenge in his voice.

“ That remains to be seen,” replied Ananda shortly, as though he grudged the precious moments wasted in speech with any one but his wife. He turned to her again. “ Beloved ! There is no reason why you should not come to me now.”

Hot words of desperate pleading fell from his lips. He had no more regard for the presence of the swami than for a yellow lizard on the wall. Dorama listened with charmed ears, her lips apart in a smile that set her husband’s pulses throbbing. She too under the magical influence of long deferred love was unconscious of the presence that overshadowed them.

She had promised faithfully to plead the cause of Hinduism, but religion was forgotten. Love and love alone was paramount. Nothing else mattered. Her eyes shone with a light that spoke volumes to both men, bringing joy and hope to Ananda but misgiving to the guru. He had not calculated on the turn events had taken. The warm impulsive greeting between husband and wife had been out of his reckoning. The magical effect of touch had been undreamed of.

Another factor that had not been considered was Ananda's matured manhood. The timid boy whom the guru had instructed in the old days with fatherly authority was gone, and in his place stood an individual of strong character developed in the hard school of persecution. It was not easy for the guru to obtain a hearing. He seized upon a pause when the husband having made his appeal waited for his wife's reply.

"Woman!" he cried, in a rough overbearing voice. "Tell your husband under what conditions you will consent to join him."

Dorama gave the swami a frightened glance, and began in a faltering voice as though she were repeating a half-learned lesson.

"If my lord will consent to the rites being performed——"

"Beloved wife! light of my eyes! joy of my heart! the ceremonies that made me your husband were long ago performed. They need not be repeated!"

"She means——" began the guru in a still louder voice than he had addressed Dorama.

Ananda took a step forward and in tones that echoed round the room, said—

"Silence, swami, silence! Let the husband plead with his wife. All the world over the rule holds good that the wife shall listen to her husband; aye, and obey him!"

"Outcaste, and cursed of the gods! She is no wife of yours!"

“Christian or Hindu, we are one, she and I whatever you may say!” Again he turned to Dorama. “My lotus bud, my pearl! Do not listen to his words. Believe me you are mine for ever. Do you remember our marriage, not the mere ceremonies that made you mine; but the after rites when they gave you into my arms? We were so young then! We were like children half grown and only half awake. Now, now, loved one! my own little wife! we are awake, yes, awake and waiting and longing! Come, beloved! We have waited too long!”

The words poured from his lips in an irresistible torrent, and the guru was powerless to stop them. At their conclusion Ananda moved towards his wife who stood with hands clasped, her face turned to his.

“Back, back!” cried the guru in threatening accents.

“Come, come, beloved!”

With a swift decisive movement Ananda thrust aside the intervening body of the guru; and Dorama half sobbing, half laughing, and wholly sweet and yielding, was once again in his strong embrace; once, again in spite of the terrible presence of the swami, she felt his lips upon hers and dared—yes, dared to give back kiss for kiss. Then she felt herself put away with the same purposeful force.

“Go, little one, go before the swami curse you,” he said in her ear. Dropping his voice to a whisper he continued rapidly. “You know where to find me. If your heart is brave enough to seek your husband, come

by day or in the dead of night, beloved, and you will find your place in these arms. Now go, light of my eyes, my priceless jewel ! ”

As he spoke he gently pushed her to the door and, opening it, thrust her out, closing it after her. He returned to the middle of the room and looked the guru squarely in the face.

“ Now, swami,” he said temperately ; “ speak out ! Say what you have to say as man to man. I am ready to listen. Curse me if you like by all your gods. Your curses cannot hurt.”

The unflinching gaze that accompanied this speech told the guru more plainly than words that as far as Ananda was concerned his authority was called in question, his influence was gone and his godhead denied. “ As man to man,” Ananda had said. There was no recognition of twice-born infallibility in that sentence. The guru ground his teeth in his rage. He knew what it meant ; it was the attitude of the cursed Christian towards the Brahman. The Brahman and Christian met as man to man on a common human platform ; and the man without caste, the follower of a strange faith that denied the Hindu deities claimed to be equal with the divinely born exponent of the Vedas, the being of exalted caste who was immune from sin. He, the guru, the swami, in whose body resided the mantric essence, the soul of the deity, he who was sinless, was thrust from his pedestal by one whom he had instructed in his youth !

Words failed him and he was speechless ; he had lost command of his tongue and he could neither curse nor upbraid. Not only had Ananda spoken to him as an equal, but when he would have interposed between husband and wife, the apostate had laid a vigorous hand on him full of strength and determination and had put him aside. Never before had he been addressed in that manner, and never had such a thing been heard of as to touch the sacred person of a swami with a sacrilegious hand.

The warm shades of his skin yellowed and he gasped as he made for the door. With a strange courtesy learned in England Ananda passed before him, lifted the latch and held the door open. The guru strode from the room transported with a rage that knew no bounds ; and Ananda even as he rejoiced in his triumph wondered vaguely in what form the man's vengeance would fall. God grant that it might be directed against himself, and not against the beautiful woman who had so lately nestled in his arms.

CHAPTER XVII

ANANDA'S interview with his wife and the guru produced a curious result. It not only roused him out of meek resignation, but it stimulated his nerves, strengthened his will, and focussed his mental vision on the situation created by his conversion to Christianity. It was as though a certain visible growth had begun ; the fruit of that growth promised to be action.

Hitherto his policy had been one of waiting and of patience amounting to little less than apathy. He had been drifting and existing rather than acting and living. It is true that the passive period was not without its advantage.

The plant that shows no shoot above ground is not necessarily dormant and idle. There may be great activity underneath the soil. It was so with Ananda. Strong roots capable of standing the stress of mental disturbance developed. From them were to spring actions that would be marked by endurance and fortitude, where formerly there had been weakness and timidity.

As he held the soft yielding figure of his wife in his arms he was conscious of a concentration of purpose he had never experienced before. The waiting policy

insensibly died. Definite determination took the place of vague desire. He resolved to strike out a line for himself. The object of it should be to gain possession of his wife and child and to find a means of providing a home for them both. With this determination came the conviction that his wishes could not be fulfilled by remaining any longer under his father's roof. He must leave home as soon as possible. The opportunity for so doing had been offered, but he had refused it. He must reconsider it. There was no necessity to write, it would be better not to do so lest by any chance the letter was tampered with. He was aware that he would be watched and spied upon more than ever after what had passed between himself and the guru ; he must be cautious if he wished to escape. Alderbury, he was sure, would give him a warm welcome, and again proffer the helping hand.

He counted the change left out of Bopaul's ten rupee note. There was more than enough left to pay for his journey to the headquarters of the mission, whether he went by road or by rail.

The next question to be considered was the best means of getting away from the house with his luggage without raising opposition or provoking assault. The only servant at his disposal was the pariah, and his good offices were restricted by the fact that he had again been forbidden to wait on the young master any longer. His visits had to be paid secretly and at night. The man need not have come at all ; but with that fidelity

so often found among the lower people of India who serve their superiors, he remained faithful to the son of the house whom he had known and worshipped from a distance as a child and boy.

When the lights were extinguished and voices ceased murmuring in the women's rooms, the untouchable, as the caste people termed the pariah, crept softly into the little yard and entered the room where Ananda slept. By the dim light of the tumbler lamp he performed the duties he had been forbidden to do. With quick, silent fingers he tidied the room, cleaned the shoes and filled the earthen chafing-dish with fresh charcoal. So quiet was he in all his movements that his master's deep sleep was undisturbed till the moment when a gentle rattle of the milkean against the compound wall outside told of the arrival of the milkman with his cow. Even then the faithful servitor, remembering his uncleanness, forbore to lay a hand upon the recumbent figure. Kneeling by his side he uttered the loud chirrup of the wall-lizard until the sound pierced the brain of the sleeper. Then Ananda rose, and, taking up the milk-bottle that belonged to his tiffin-basket, went to fetch the milk. The pariah watched, and when his master returned he blew up the charcoal on which the coffee was to be made. No conversation passed between the two. The one received and the other gave his services without thanks or apology. Yet Ananda was not ungrateful.

Although nothing of any consequence was said, this curious intimacy had a beneficial effect upon the 'vert.

Unconsciously he was learning that wonderful lesson of Christianity—the brotherhood of man. His repugnance to the pariah was decreasing, and he no longer shrank with disgust as his eye fell upon his figure. The books given by Alderbury contained much that bore on the subject, and Ananda had had plenty of leisure to absorb their contents, with the result that in his desperate need he was able to turn without repulsion to the only human being who could render help.

In the small hours of the morning after Ananda's interview with Dorama, the usual routine had been observed, while scarcely a word passed between the two. The man was turning away to leave, having blown up the chafing-dish of live coal, when Ananda called softly to him. He stopped at once, and salaamed, wondering what his master could have to say if it was not complaint at some unconscious shortcoming in his service.

“I must leave my father's house, and I require your help.”

Again the pariah touched his forehead with both hands; then, placing them together, palm to palm, he listened deferentially to Ananda's explanation and instructions. He was to bring a cart to take the luggage to the station in time to catch the night mail of that day.

The pariah prostrated himself and lifted his folded hands in entreaty.

“Sir! this unworthy slave prays your honour to be careful. There are men in the town who openly declare that if they meet your excellency they will beat you and

drive away the Christian devil which they say has entered the noble body of the presence. During the day they wait outside hoping to catch your honour walking. There is danger also in the house."

"Danger!" repeated Ananda quickly. "How is that? Stand up and tell me about it."

The man rose apologetically to his feet and continued his story.

"My wife sweeps out the back yard where the refuse is thrown. She heard one of the kitchen women telling the girl from the market that the swami departed in anger, and that his wrath must be appeased, otherwise worse misfortune will befall the family. He left orders with the small master, the brother of our most noble big master, that your excellency was not to be allowed to leave the grounds."

"How can he stop me?" asked Ananda, with some heat.

"By the aid of the men who watch outside."

"Are they there all night?"

"No, sir; they do not think that you will try to leave secretly and at night. Where could your honour go to hide, they say? Every hiding-place is known to them, and no one in the town would dare to give shelter against the wishes of Pantulu Iyer's family. Great care will be needed in leaving your honourable father's house without permission."

Ananda was silent. The fact that he was living in a state of siege that might very soon become close

imprisonment was being forced upon him. It was an unpleasant truth, but one to which he could not remain blind. His conviction that he must get away as speedily as possible grew ; and the sweeper was right in urging upon him the necessity of caution if he wished to ensure success in carrying out his intentions.

The coffee seethed on the live coals. As he removed the pot he motioned to the pariah instinctively to stand away. The action was an involuntary response to the inherited prejudice. He was obeyed instantly and without resentment. The man retired to the doorway, and would have passed out into the darkness had it not been for another command.

“ Come back, I have not finished what I have to say. Tell me, what do you think ought to be done ? ”

The other glanced at him in surprise, although he did not venture to express it. Had ever one of the twice-born been heard to ask the advice of a sweeper ? If he should dare to say in the hearing of men of caste that he had been thus consulted, he would be beaten for his presumption until his back streamed with blood.

With ever-recurring apology for daring to advise so great an excellency, he unfolded a plan of escape which seemed to Ananda, the more he considered it, the only possible means of getting away. The excellency was to pack his property into parcels and bundles which the sweeper would convey away in the night with the assistance of his wife and son to some safe hiding-place in the jungle. The portmanteaux must be left behind,

empty, or suspicion would be roused if by chance one of the family paid a visit to the master. On the second night after the household had retired Ananda was to steal quietly away and walk to a station some distance from the town, where he would not be recognised. The sweeper and his relatives would act as carriers for his luggage. His sister who served the College excellency would obtain a day's holiday from the housekeeper and help. All might be relied upon for keeping the secret, and his honour need have no fear.

Ananda made only one suggestion, that he should start with them and take the train twenty-four hours earlier. To this the man objected on the score of requiring more time to make the arrangements for the night march. When Ananda spoke of a reward the pariah protested vehemently that none was required. Some day in the future, when his honour had grown rich, perhaps he would allow his son and daughter to serve him—a promise easy to give and easy to perform when the time should come. The crowing of cocks fell on their ears, and the men started.

“I must be going, sir. The women will soon awake and be moving to the cattle shed. Your excellency must forgive this worthless servant for touching your honour's sacred property ; but there is no other way,” he said deprecatingly.

“It is forgiven,” replied Ananda, remembering how roughly he had bidden that same man on his arrival to leave his trunks alone. Rather than have them

contaminated by his touch he had himself hauled them into his room. "Did you not carry the Englishman's food basket for him? Then surely you may carry my clothing without offence."

All day Ananda was busy in the privacy of his little den, putting his personal belongings together in handy portable parcels, tying some in bundles when his limited supply of brown paper and string came to an end. Quiet reigned over the house; and if he chanced to look out of the door no one crossed his line of vision in the compound. By the afternoon he had finished. He put on his cap to take a little walk. Beyond the wall that bounded the grounds he caught sight of two or three figures. They would have attracted no attention had it not been for the warning of the pariah. The man was correct. Undoubtedly he was being watched as far as the outside of the house was concerned, and with no friendly intention either; but as long as he remained indoors he was left severely alone. This was satisfactory, as the sight of his preparations would rouse suspicion and endanger the success of his scheme.

His eyes frequently sought that part of the house in which he knew were the women's quarters. The small jealously-shuttered windows gave no hint of what was passing behind the venetians. Was Dorama there? Did she seek for a glimpse of her husband as eagerly as he craved for a sight of his wife?

He paced up and down, book in hand, his thoughts busy elsewhere. The luggage was ready in its new form,

and it was to be carried off that very night. In the small hours of the following night he would quietly slip away, and thus cut himself adrift for ever from the home of his birth.

Again he searched the landscape. A strong desire to see and speak once more with his wife lay at the back of his mind. He wanted to tell her of his plans ; to ask her to wait and to beg of her to join him as soon as he had a shelter to offer her.

He cudgelled his brains for some device by which a message might be conveyed in safety, and could only think of the sweeper. The pariah servant had no opportunity, however, of approaching the lady Dorama within speaking distance. Even if chance favoured the messenger he would be unable to carry out his mission. At the mere sight of him she would shrink away with all the prejudice of her caste, and resent the smallest breach of the caste law. The pariah, by the unwritten law, could not do otherwise than maintain the prescribed distance between her and himself. If he dropped a letter in her path or placed it where she might find it, his contaminating touch would be sufficient for her avoidance of the missive. Moreover, a written letter was of no use. She could neither read nor write. His only hope was in a chance interview, and as the hours slipped by the hope grew fainter.

The following day passed heavily. The luggage was safely removed without accident. His books and writing materials were gone with the rest of his property, and

he would not see them again till he arrived at the distant station. He had biscuits with him and some pomegranates. The sharp sweetness of the juice served to assuage his thirst.

He went out into the compound as often as he dared. It did not do to spend too much time in the open, since it had not been his habit. It might be remarked upon. He noted the figures beyond the wall, and knew that he was being watched with the same vigilance as was shown yesterday and the day before. Frequently his eye turned towards the blue-green mountain mass with its dark-grey rocks and heavy forest. Then he looked back at the familiar building, the home of his ancestors, and once the hot unshed tears made his eyes smart at the thought of leaving it. The blood rushed to his head and back again to his heart with a violence that almost threw him off his mental balance. Could he muster up strength enough to abandon all that the home meant? Would he have the courage when the moment came to sever the ties that bound him to father, mother, wife—no, not wife! She and the child would follow by and by. He refused to entertain any doubt on the subject.

All the same, he was conscious of a shudder, the kind of inward quake experienced by the soldier at the sound of the first bullet whizzing over his head on the battle-field. He checked it at once and took a fresh grip of himself, sternly and resolutely shutting down sentiment and its companion emotion.

“I can’t go back! I can’t go back! There is nothing but hideous darkness behind me. I must go forward. The light is in front! Ah! dear Christ, the Son of God! lead me forward in safety! Lead me on!”

The mental disturbance passed as suddenly as it had overwhelmed him. Once more he was conscious of a great peace. It was as though he had entered that wonderful temple of God standing in the heart of London, where the strains of the organ rise above the roar of the streets, and where a man may feel that he is in the presence of the living God of Love, the Father of the Universe.

The sun dropped behind a shoulder of the mountain, and the sky broke into a glory of many colours. He watched it until it faded. Suddenly he was startled by a sound. As the last ray left the top of the hill and the forest mantled into a sombre green, a wail arose in the women’s rooms. It was followed by the beat of a tom-tom.

He stood at the entrance of the yard and listened. As the light faded the wailing increased. He could distinguish by the sound of the voices a movement. They were leaving the house for the garden.

Yes! He knew the ritual of old! Some one was dying, and death was close at hand. The man or woman—he started as the thought struck him that it might be his father—had been carried out of the house and laid upon mother earth to breathe his last.

How well he remembered the ceremonies with which

death was greeted ; the lifting with tender care of the dying from the cot or mat and the gentle placing of the gasping patient upon the smooth ground. Close by grew the sacred tulsi, without which no spirit could take its flight in peace. He could picture his mother bending over the plant to gather a sprig. He fancied he could smell the aromatic scent of the broken stalk of sweet basil as she placed the sprig above the head of the sufferer—perhaps touching the dry lips with it, leading as she did so the wail of mourning.

The chorus of women's voices swelled on the evening air ; the whole household must be joining in. Who could it be ? The pariah had said nothing of any illness in the family. If it had been his father the man would have mentioned it. He concluded that it must be one of the many relatives who lived in the house. Some of them had joined the family during his absence in England ; others had grown out of knowledge ; it was useless for him to conjecture.

The presence of death is always a solemn moment, even though the person may not be known. Ananda remained standing by the entrance of the yard, his eyes turned towards the west, but his ears bent to catch every sound that came from the house. Each change in the note of grief spoke eloquently of the ebbing life, and he listened for the final cries that would betoken the drawing of the last breath.

The colour died out of the sky except upon the horizon, which glowed with a vivid luminous green.

The steady yellow light of the evening star shone in the wake of the sun's path. Bats fluttered in the air, following the strong-winged moth that sought the almond-scented blossoms of the oleander. In the distance the faint hum of the town rose occasionally and died away again. A cart went slowly by, its axles groaning as the bullocks plodded along, urged by the guttural shouts of the sleepy driver.

The wailing in the house stopped and silence reigned. The stars grew brighter and the living green of the west was lost in darkening greys. An owl in the distant forest sent forth a discordant shriek. As if in reply the familiar note of grief was renewed in slightly different tones mingled with a violent tomtoming.

Death had come ; and the patient, whoever he or she might be, had drawn the last breath.

Memory was busy with the past once more. Sad though the sound of mourning might be, it belonged to his life. Death without those accompanying sounds would not seem to be death, any more than marriage would seem to be marriage without the dancing girls and their love-songs.

He had renounced all such things and set them aside for ever. Again, with a determined effort, he thrust sentiment aside and shut his ears to the mourning. All night long the mourners would be up and busy over the preparations for the disposal of the body the next day. There was no reason why he should not sleep however. He had a long walk before him. The sweeper was to

meet him at the station in the morning at eight o'clock, and he was to take the train that was due soon after that hour. He intended starting between three and four. The road was familiar. India is not troubled with too many by-paths. Even if the route had been unknown to him, he could not easily have missed it.

He retired to his room and threw himself upon his charpoy bed. He could still hear the monotonous wailing, but it was not disturbing. Having reassured himself that it could not possibly be his father, he troubled no more about the unknown dead. On the whole it was fortunate that the household was occupied with its own affairs. There was less likelihood of attention being directed towards himself. His escape ought to be easy, and, thus thinking, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XVIII

ANANDA lay in a deep, dreamless sleep, the restful slumber of a healthy man whose mind was as wholesome as his body. One hand was tucked under his cheek, the other was thrown forward and hung slightly over the edge of the cot. All his troubles, his doubts and fears, his deprivations and hardships, lately inflicted, were forgotten. It was the best preparation he could have for entrance on the new life, when he would have to live "by the sweat of his brow," like a multitude of good men who had gone before him, and others who would come after him.

He had had four hours of solid sleep without stirring, when he became aware of a touch upon the hand that rested on the border of the bed. It was a soft, coaxing touch that sent an electric message to his brain. In the old days before he went to England that same touch had often roused him at dawn. He lifted his head and breathed one word :

"Wife !"

"I am here !" came the ready response.

She was in his arms the next moment, clinging to

him whilst convulsive sobs—stifled, but none the less strong—shook her from head to foot.

At first words failed them both, he in his astonishment and she in the violence of her grief ; but as tears relieved the overburdened brain of the woman she regained sufficient command of herself to speak.

“ Our little son !—my baby ! He is dead ! ”

Then, as an exclamation escaped Ananda’s lips, she placed her hand over his mouth.

“ Ah ! hush ! ” she whispered. “ They do not know that I have come to you. If they find me here they will beat me again ! ”

“ Beat you ! My pearl ! Who has dared to lay a finger upon my wife ? ” he whispered fiercely, drawing her still closer.

“ Our uncle’s wife. Of late she has taken much upon herself. She has tried continually to push me from my place, saying that her husband would be the big master of the house when your father died. Then she will be mistress, and as such it was only fitting that she should come next to your mother instead of me.”

“ But why should she strike you ? ”

“ Ah ! husband !—the child ! They say that it was through my neglect and carelessness that the boy came under the influence of the evil eye ; it was but right therefore that I should be punished.”

The bereaved mother poured the story of little Royan’s illness and death into her husband’s ears. Together the parents wept, stifling their grief lest the

sound of a sob or a sigh should betray them. Little, indeed, had Ananda suspected that as he listened indifferently to the wailing his beloved child was passing away from them for ever.

“What will life be without my child or my husband?” cried Dorama at last. “I cannot bear it; I shall die!”

“No, you will not. Beloved, I am leaving my home to-night to find more liberty than I am given here in this cruel town. Come with me. Let us go together. Once across the border of the State our rights will be respected. We are of age, free to act as we choose, and no one can separate you from me or do either of us any hurt.”

“Husband! I am your obedient wife!”

* * * * *

Ananda looked at his watch. It was half-past two.

“It is time we started, beloved. Can you walk as far?” he asked anxiously as he made his final preparations.

“I can walk the distance easily if my lord will give me time.”

“Then let us begin the journey at once. We will go to the further corner of the compound and get over the wall. Before the sun is up we shall be far enough from the town not to fear recognition.”

Together they crept across the enclosure, Ananda beating the grass softly with his stick at each step, to drive away the chance snake. Dorama followed closely.

The wall presented no difficulty; but as Ananda

dropped lightly into the road he startled a half-starved pariah dog returning to the town after its nightly prowling for food. The dog, more in fear than anger, barked wildly at him. Dorama, alarmed, hesitated to follow. He threw a stone at the animal with the intention of frightening it. As bad luck would have it the stone struck the dog, and though it was not much hurt, it shrieked after the manner of the village cur, as if it had been nearly killed.

“Wait!” said Ananda to his wife, who had not yet joined him in the road. “Sit down under the wall. The long grass will hide you.”

He watched the house for a few minutes to see if a light moved or if there was any indication of an alarm being raised and a search. If Dorama’s absence were discovered an immediate hunt would be made, and the noise of the dog would give a hint of the direction she had taken.

No sign of any movement was apparent, and Dorama, recovering her nerve, climbed the wall and joined him. They set off at a steady pace. There was no moon; but the stars gave sufficient light to help the travellers along the broad, well-kept road. Dorama’s little feet were bare. They fell noiselessly except for the chink of her silver toe-rings. Ananda wore English boots, strong and serviceable; but the warm, sub-tropical climate had affected the leather and made them creak. Possibly it was the noise of his tread that drowned the sound of approaching footsteps.

Dorama was the first to hear it. She stopped and laid her hand on her husband's arm.

"What is that ?" she asked sharply.

Before he could reply four men running barefooted came up with them from behind. Three of them hurled themselves upon Ananda. The fourth seized Dorama roughly by the arm.

"What madness is this ?" cried the voice of their uncle. "Who gave you permission to take away the daughter of the house ?" he demanded of Ananda.

The only reply of the latter was to struggle violently. He was soon overpowered, and between his three captors he was marched back towards his father's house. Ten minutes later he found himself once more in the little outhouse with his empty trunks. The door was closed upon him and its primitive hasp secured with a padlock. He was without food and without his personal property ; but his concern was not for himself, it was for the weeping and trembling woman who was wrested from him to be driven back in unmerited disgrace and perhaps imprisoned like himself. There was nothing to be done but to submit, at least, for the present. He was calm and self-controlled once more now that he was alone. He would wait patiently for developments, relying on the love that he knew his parents bore him. It was impossible to believe that they had any intention of doing him personal violence, though they might subject him to further humiliation and discomfort.

It was the dog that did the mischief and put Sooba

on the track of the fugitives. Dorama's absence was discovered as soon as she was required for a ceremony in the death chamber as mother of the dead boy. A search was made through the house, and some one suggested that possibly she had gone to the well to put an end to her sorrow for lost husband and child. Another mentioned Ananda. Could she have sought him in her trouble? After their interview in the presence of the guru it was not unlikely. When his room was found to be empty the belief was confirmed that the two were together somewhere, perhaps on the premises, perhaps in the forest.

The shriek of the dog betrayed the fact that it had encountered a human being and received some hurt. Its cry was a howl of pain and not of anger, as would have been the case had it met one of its own kind. The sharp ears of the man who of all that numerous family did not mourn the dead nor the disgraced, caught the sound, and he jumped to a correct conclusion. Further thought pointed to the obvious fact that the missing couple would not be likely to take the road leading to the town. In a short time he gathered a band of willing helpers, and, as we have seen, the capture was made.

Having disposed of the couple, Sooba called a family council. Pantulu declined to be present, but Gunga attended it. A decision was arrived at that she and her husband should leave the house that afternoon immediately after the funeral. They were to travel by bullock coach to one of his silk farms some ten miles distant from

Chirapore. A small bungalow occupied by a relative who superintended the silk-worm culture would house them for a few days or until—Gunga looked at her brother-in-law sadly—until her husband had recovered his health. Other matters were discussed with general unanimity as to the course that should be taken as soon as Pantulu was removed. When it was over Gunga sought Dorama. The stern, unyielding woman stood in the centre of the room, her daughter-in-law prostrate at her feet. The younger woman trembled as she listened, and when the tale was ended she was shaken with sobs.

“Mother ! mother !” she wailed. “Is it necessary ? Must it be ?”

The tears stood in Gunga’s eyes as she pronounced again the sentence passed by the guru on her son and confirmed by the common consent of the family.

“Spare him, mother ! spare him !” pleaded Dorama.

“He did not spare us his parents, nor his son, whose death he has caused. In a short time we shall carry his father to the arms of mother earth, as yesterday we carried the child. Why should we spare him ?”

Dorama bowed her head in silence. She dared not question the accusation. Being a Hindu she was inclined to the belief that unconsciously his regard falling on the child as it did might have had an evil influence. Nor could she be blind to the probability that Pantulu would die of grief before many weeks were over.

“There must be punishment for you too, daughter,” continued Gunga.

Dorama's hands were raised over her bowed head as if to protect herself from a shower of blows. The fear of immediate violence was without foundation. Gunga took no pleasure in inflicting pain. The task would be left to the man whose power in the house was growing more dominant each day that passed.

The last rites for the disposal of little Royan's body were performed, and the party had returned to the house to watch the departure of the master and mistress. The coach was ready, and the bullock bells jangled as the large white beasts shook the flies from their heads and stamped a cloven hoof, breathing out heavily through their glistening nostrils.

Pantulu, bowed like a man of seventy, left the house by himself and climbed into the bullock coach without waiting for his wife. She stayed behind to give the final directions to her women. As she crossed the threshold to the big iron-studded door, Dorama ran forward and caught her arm.

"Mother! mother! is it not possible to pass over the offence? Oh! mother! I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it!"

Gunga released herself with no light touch from the clinging hand and spoke with a roughness that hid her own emotion.

"Go back to your room. You forget yourself, daughter! Look at the big master! Is not the sight of his deep sorrow and affliction enough to win the consent of every member of his house?"

Dorama's face sought shelter behind her trembling hands, and she began to cry piteously like a child. Her mother-in-law strode on towards the bullock coach, her grey head covered with the saree drawn like a hood over her forehead till her features were almost hidden. She did not keep strict purdahnasheen, but she was careful not to expose herself to the public gaze more than was necessary. Sooba himself closed the door of the coach.

"Farewell, sister," he said in a smooth voice. "The change will do my brother good if anything will; but his spirit is too much broken by his many sorrows to give us any hope of his recovery. It is a matter of time only."

"We shall see," replied Gunga sharply, and not best pleased at the assurance with which her husband's death was mentioned.

"By the time you return," continued Sooba, unruffled, "we shall have better news to tell you of the breaking of an obstinate will."

Gunga turned from him without response. The motherly instinct in her struggled to make its voice heard. She stifled it ruthlessly. Yet she looked back as the bullocks moved forward with an uneven jerk and said—

"Do nothing but what the swami commanded," she said. "It will be sufficient."

The noise of the wheels prevented further conversation. Sooba, watching the cart as it swayed in its exit through the gateway of the compound wall smiled unpleasantly.

“It was just as well that I did not tell her all, or she might have refused to leave the house. Mothers are in the way when troublesome sons and daughters require chastisement.”

He passed through the centre courtyard towards the back of the building. Dorama, dejected and miserable, her eyelids swollen with weeping, stood listlessly near the kitchen door. His eyes dwelt on her jewellery, the gold bangles on her arms, her nose and ear ornaments, and a pearl necklace that covered the cord on which was suspended the marriage token.

Inside the kitchen the sharp voice of his wife was raised as she issued orders to the gang of women employed in cooking the evening meal. She came to the door and caught sight of her husband. There was an exchange of glances between the new self-constituted master and mistress. It was sufficient without speech. She called to Dorama.

“Come, little sister ; enough of grieving ! Go into the kitchen and see to the making of the green chutneys. The girl who is pounding them is too stupid to flavour it to your uncle’s liking. Now that the big mistress is away I must take her place. It is a favour to allow you to take mine.”

Dorama glanced at her through misty eyes. She did not answer, but entered the kitchen and seated herself by the side of the girl who was compounding the delicacies known as green chutneys. The work she had been asked to do was light, and she was glad to be

employed. Hitherto it had not been thought necessary that she should help with the preparation of meals. The care of the child was considered sufficient occupation ; but now she was without any charge it was only right that she should take her share in the household duties. She had no objection to the labour involved ; but she could not help feeling the humiliation of the position assigned her. As wife of the son and heir she ranked next to the mistress. It was she who should be at the head of the household giving orders. It was she who should light the lamp at evening and call together the family at daybreak for the morning hymn and pujah. Before Ananda returned, and while the child lived, she had looked forward confidently to the time when she should succeed to these recognised duties of the mistress of the zenana. Now the bitter truth was thrust upon her ; with her husband outcasted and her son dead they could never be hers. Silently she took up the work assigned to her, tears dropping occasionally from her sad eyes.

The women in the kitchen glanced at her with a sympathy they dared not express. There was not one among them who would not have preferred to see Dorama in her aunt's place. In view of what the near future probably held they deemed it wiser to keep their thoughts to themselves and to obey orders without a murmur.

At the evening meal Dorama was made to feel again her subordinate position both in serving the men and in being served herself. But it came to an end at last.

When it was finished the green leaf platters were thrown out on the refuse heap ; the brass pots and dishes were rinsed and turned upside down to drain, and the kitchen fires were allowed to sink into grey ash. Many of the women, tired out with a night of preparation for the funeral, lay down on their mats, and drawing a sheet over their heads, were soon fast asleep. Two or three continued to move about the house, not having completed their duties. One by one they too retired, and only Dorama remained awake. As soon as she was assured that her companions were safely asleep she rose and opened the door. Placing it ajar, she seated herself close to it, so that she had a view of the central court through the narrow opening. Her heart beat like a sledge-hammer. It seemed to her that it must be heard throughout the house. An hour passed, and still she continued to watch and wait with wakeful eye and alert ear.

Between ten and eleven she caught sight of the dark forms of men passing silently through the courtyard towards the back verandah. They entered the garden, and turning through the gate in the garden wall, went towards the room occupied by Ananda.

Before daring to follow she waited for sign of further movement in the men's quarters. There might be others who out of curiosity, if nothing else, would join their superiors uninvited. All was silent, and she concluded that they who intended to visit her husband that night had gone to his room.

Gathering her saree closely round her she crept out into the courtyard, taking care to close the door of the sleeping-room after her. Listening and moving with the utmost caution, she went through the garden door and out into the compound. The stars were bright, and by their light she could distinguish the footpath leading direct to the little yard where the green gourd flourished.

She hesitated to venture along the track by which the men might return at any minute. Her courage failing her she followed the wall till she reached the first corner. Here she stopped and listened. Feeling her way, she went on till she arrived at a spot outside the yard which she calculated was close to the open door of Ananda's room. The fear of snakes was conquered in her intense anxiety to learn what was happening, and she crouched low down in the long grass till she was hidden from sight.

The position she had chosen was the best for the purpose of overhearing all that passed in Ananda's room. Only twenty-four hours before, she had entered it with confidence, and sought for consolation in her distress at the loss of her child. His love and his pity were poured out upon her. His kisses were still warm upon her lips. She seemed to hear the words of joy and love that he breathed in her ear as he held her to him. She thrilled again when she recalled all that he had promised of the future that should be theirs, if she would take her courage in her hands and come away with him—future love, future happiness, future maternity, all might be secured

if only she would be brave. In British territory his rights would be recognised—how hopefully he spoke!—he could earn enough to keep them both. She would be a happy wife, her own mistress, with no aunt to bully and tyrannise; and if the good God willed it, she would also be a happy mother again. As he pleaded she forgot his broken caste, his disgrace, his excommunication. A new and great love blossomed out of the old, bestowing upon her both courage and faith. She would go with him—oh, so gladly! she whispered. What had she to live for now but her lord, her husband! The grip of his arms told her how he appreciated her devotion.

Then came the sudden ending to their dreams. That golden future which was to begin then and there was shattered; and punishment, dread bodily punishment, was to be meted out to the one human being left for her to love.

Her train of thought was disturbed by voices. Her uncle's dominated the rest. It was loud and overbearing, and it seemed to increase in acrimony as he talked. Ananda's replies were given temperately yet firmly. Apparently angry tones and open insults had no power to raise fear or wrath. He presented a firm front, growing, if anything, calmer as the other became more excited. The older man would have found his task easier if his nephew had lost his temper, and become abusive and violent.

Again and again Sooba demanded recantation. Each demand was met with a firm refusal, given patiently

and without faltering. Threats and blustering commands produced no effect, and so far the victory lay with the younger man. That his uncle was fast losing control of himself was evident by his lapse now and then into a veritable scream of rage.

After an outburst of this kind more virulent than any that had gone before, came a call to his confederates. Four or five men who were waiting outside the door, entered, and Dorama could distinguish that some action was taking place. She divined what it was, though she heard no words. Violence was being done to her husband's person, and he had not met it with the calmness that had characterised his speech. He had fought for his liberty, and in his struggles he had knocked over two of his assailants and his chair. Five strong men were too many for him however ; and as the noise and the scuffle subsided, Dorama knew that he was secured and bound.

Once more there was silence ; it was presently broken by the hectoring tones of Sooba. This time they met with no reply. The men who had helped added their voices and raised an angry chorus of upbraiding and reproach. It died down when their vocabulary of abuse was exhausted. This time the silence was so complete that Dorama could hear the melancholy cry of a night-bird as it passed overhead on its way to the forest-clad slopes of the mountain. In the distance a jackal howled and led the yelping of the prowling pack of night-scavengers.

Suddenly she started and shivered as a sound fell on her ear that she had heard before at rare intervals in her life. It was repeated, and she trembled from head to foot, burying her face in her hands.

The Hindus, rich and poor, much as they love litigation over boundaries, irrigation rights and the division of property, rarely bring family quarrels and offences into court. In cases of murder the law interferes ; but where it is only assault in the privacy of the family, it is kept strictly private. The victim and the aggressor equally shrink from the public inquiry necessitating the intrusion of the police.

Dorama understood perfectly what was happening. It would have been wise if she had returned then and there to her room. She could do no good by stopping, and she ran a risk of being discovered. But although she was aware of what would be discreet and wise, she was unable to tear herself away. It seemed heartless to the beloved one to leave him in his dark hour. She could not bring him consolation, but she could suffer with him.

And suffer she assuredly did. At every recurrence of the dull thud she shivered as though she herself had been struck. Once a low cry escaped the lips of the victim, and her nails dug into her breast clawing unconsciously her own soft smooth flesh in her agony.

Fifteen minutes passed which seemed fifteen hours. Surely it was enough and more than enough to expiate his sin against the guru and against his family. Now

they would stop ! they must stop ! that horrible sound must cease ! But the sentence of the swami was not completed yet, and again her ears were assailed by that ominous thud. He bore it very silently. Had they gagged him ? or was he faint, she wondered ?

At last a groan came from the sufferer, as though his endurance were failing. It was too much for Dorama. She felt that she must shriek aloud if she remained a moment longer. She rose to her feet and, impelled by a mad desire to help him, she ran to the entrance of the yard. How she was to accomplish her purpose she was not composed enough to think.

The door of the room was open. She hesitated. Dare she enter and bid them stop in their cruel work ? No ! no ! it would only increase their fury, and they would visit her offence upon him. Perhaps they would kill him. In the light of the yellow oil lamp she caught sight of the bamboo as it was once more lifted with slow, deliberate precision.

Putting her fingers in her ears she fled, never stopping until she reached the room in which she slept. Prostrate upon her mat, her saree over her mouth to stifle her sobbing, she lay convulsed with grief. The women in the room slept heavily. One of them stirred. She lifted her head, drew aside the sheet that covered her, and listened.

“ Is that you, sister ? Poor little mother ! The child is gone, and all through that evil husband of yours ! May he be cursed in a thousand miserable births ! Lie down, child ! Think no more about him ! ”

Dorama did not reply. She subdued her sobs, and listened once more with painful alertness for the sound of returning steps through the inner courtyard. They came, and as the men walked slowly back they talked in low voices. It was well for Dorama's peace of mind that she could not hear what they said.

"Will he die under it?" asked one.

"Not he!" replied Sooba. "I took care to use the stick so that it neither killed nor broke bones. Although a Christian has no standing in a court of law in the State of Chirakul, there might be trouble with the English if he were done to death."

"Where was he going when we caught him?"

"To the missionary," replied Sooba, shortly.

"No fear of his attempting to run away again just yet. He will not be able to stand for a couple of days," remarked one.

"Therefore I did not trouble to lock the door," said another.

"He has starved since last night, and now he has been beaten. All this will surely drive the devil out of him," said a third.

"If not he can have plenty more of the same medicine," rejoined Sooba, at which they all laughed in the best of humours.

CHAPTER XIX

MRS. HULVER was in what she termed "a fine taking," as Eola could see with half an eye. When they met as usual after breakfast to consult together on household matters the young mistress inquired what was the matter.

"Never mind me, miss," said the housekeeper with resolution. "I'll tell you all about it when we've done the cook and butler business. Ramachetty!"

He glided forward instantly, followed by his satellite, the cook; and the daily routine followed. The supplies bought that morning were displayed. How Eola hated the sight of the raw meat and live fowls exhibited for her inspection! The butler's accounts were rendered, and what was a more difficult matter, brought into accordance with her own. The patient servants received their dismissal; the butler happy in the thought that he had succeeded in over-charging his mistress exactly ten annas in spite of the eagle eye of the housekeeper; the cook equally content in having cheated the butler out of four annas; the cook boy pleased with himself in the purloining of an onion, a potato, half-a-dozen leaves of the cabbage and as much ghee as an expert finger

could scoop out of the pot. Even the kitchen-woman was self-congratulatory. She had substituted a rotten egg for a sound one brought from market ; adulterated the coffee during the pounding process with burnt rice and charred crusts of bread.

“ Now tell me what has happened to upset you, Mrs. Hulver,” said Eola, with a sympathetic kindliness that was one of her charms.

“ It’s my son, miss. Last evening the post brought me a letter to say that he was ill and was coming by the early mail this morning.”

“ And he hasn’t arrived ? ” suggested Eola.

“ On the contrary, Miss, he has come right enough ; but you never saw such an object as he is in your life. Of course I’m his mother, and as William—that was my second—used to say : ‘ Mother’s love is the same all over the world, whether her child is as beautiful as an angel or as ugly as a graven image.’ ”

“ What has happened ? ”

“ It was this way, miss. Some of the men in the regiment who ought to have known better—but as William—that was my third—used to say : ‘ Age won’t mend a born fool ’—took advantage of my boy’s youth and innocence. They enticed him into the canteen and made him drink more than was good for him. He doesn’t lean that way, I am glad to be able to say with truth ; and this will be a lesson to him.”

“ You haven’t told me yet what is the matter,” remarked Eola.

“I’m coming to it all in good time. It appears he was quarrelsome in his cups. That’s the odd part about drink, miss ; you never know how it’s going to act on your temperament. As William—that was my third—used to say : ‘Liquor is like love, Maria, me dear ; some it will make joyful, others sad ; some will want to be friends with everybody ; others will fight on the smallest pretence.’ So it was with young William ; he must needs fight another man in the canteen who was just as far gone as himself ; and properly punished he was for his pains. The sergeant treated him leniently as it was his first offence ; and gave him a few days’ leave to recover. The boy is full of sorrow and repentance. He doesn’t trouble about his black eye one little bit. What he feels is the shame of it. As William—that was my second—used to say : ‘Shame cuts deeper than any whip, and the pain we bring on ourselves is the hardest of all to bear.’ My boy is feeling the truth of his father’s saying nicely,” concluded Mrs. Hulver, with grim satisfaction.

“What was it that provoked the quarrel ? ”

“William was too far gone in drink to remember much ; but he thinks that they were all talking about these sufferagette women—I’d make them suffer if I was the King !—and the man he fought said something very nasty about the sex. I shouldn’t have troubled if I’d been William. Just look at the harm the hussies do ! Here’s William that knocked about and blackened over the eyes that his own father wouldn’t know him, all

through talking about them ! As if God hadn't made my boy dark enough in his complexion without their interference ! But as long as there are women to love there will be men to fight over them. As William—that was my third—used to say : ‘ When the Almighty gave ould Adam his wife, he handed him the shillelagh and told him to take care and use it like a gentleman. It was only after the devil interfered that Adam thought of turning it against the lady herself.’ It was the woman that started men to fight and she will keep it up to the finish,” concluded Mrs. Hulver, with some heat.

“ I am sorry you are so troubled,” said Eola.

“ And I'm vexed that any of my trouble should be passed on to you. I felt that I must tell you all about it ; it wasn't right to keep it from you and the master. I should have come to you last night only I didn't see the good of worrying you before the morning. This morning, of course, it's my duty to tell you the truth and to hide nothing. As William, the boy's own father, used to say : ‘ It's easier in the end to face the truth than to back a lie.’ ”

“ You have him in your room, I suppose ? ”

“ Yes, miss ; on the camp bed. He has fever as well, through the cold water they soused his head in when he got violent. He will be all right in a few days. I have put a piece of raw beef on his eye and a poultice on his jaw. He won't be able to talk for a day or two, but that won't matter. As William, his father, used to

say : ‘ Many suffer through too much talking, but very few through too much silence.’ I want you to come and look at him, miss.”

“ Me ! Oh ! Mrs. Hulver ! I don’t think I need come. I am sure that you know what is best for him, and will see that it is done,” said Eola, not at all in sympathy with the suggestion.

“ All the same, miss, I should feel more satisfied if you would glance your eye over him,” said Mrs. Hulver, in her most determined manner, which, as Eola knew by experience, took no denial. “ It will be good for him to see how seriously you take it. As William—that was my second—used to say : ‘ Get your shot in when and how you can ; don’t wait for the enemy to come and ask for it.’ It’s just the same with advice to the young.”

“ I am afraid I can’t do any good.”

“ Oh yes, you can, miss ; and it isn’t you to take a back seat where duty calls and you’re really wanted. Of course I know that young soldiers are hot-headed, and we can’t give them or any one else our experience any more than we can give them our digestions. Experience unbought teaches naught. They’ve all got to have it like the measles, and it seasons them and makes men of them. As William—that was my first—used to say : ‘ Man is like a curry ; he needs a lot of seasoning, and it can’t be done all in a minute.’ ”

Eola rose very reluctantly. Visiting sick soldiers who were suffering from their own indiscretions was not at all to her mind. Mrs. Hulver’s tongue continued to

run on. She bemoaned her boy's behaviour in one breath, and made excuses for him in another, with many quotations from the sayings of the defunct Williams.

"The boy had no business to go into the canteen at all; but he's young and easily misled. As William—that was my first—used to say: 'You can't roll a good cigar with green leaf.'"

Then as Eola lagged behind, showing increasing disinclination for her task, she urged her more strongly. "Come along, miss, please! Come for my sake and show yourself. It's for his good. You need not stay long. Just stand a minute near the bed and say as solemn as you can make it: 'William, I'm sorry to see you like this. Let it be a lesson!' Then you turn and go away quite slowly, and you say to me as you leave the room: 'This is very sad, Mrs. Hulver, very sad in one so young!' he won't forget it in a hurry you may be sure. Dear! dear! who would have thought it! As William—that was my third—used to say: 'Reckless youth makes rueful age.'"

As she talked she led the way to her little sitting-room. The door was open. At the further end was a camp cot and on it lay huddled the unhappy hero of the canteen row. He still wore his scarlet uniform to Eola's relief. She was dreading lest she should find him tucked up like a baby in bed. The poor fellow had undoubtedly suffered from his indiscretion. His head was tied up with raw beef and poultices, and the fever produced a shivering that necessitated the shawl muffled round his shoulders.

"A miserable-looking creature for a mother to call son! isn't he, miss? As William, his father, used to say: 'Quarrels are like fire, more easily started than stopped; and those who get into them usually come out burnt.'"

"Poor fellow, I hope he isn't much hurt," murmured Eola, quite forgetting her instructions. She stood about three feet away from the bed with as much ease as if she had been inspecting a sleeping cobra.

"Miss Wenaston says she is sorry to see you like this, William," said Mrs. Hulver promptly, and in disapproval of Eola's weakness. "She says let it be a lesson to you to keep out of the way of them that want to hurt you. As your father used to say: 'Don't go into action if you can help it; but if you have to fight, take the measure of your enemy's strength.'"

"You mustn't worry the poor fellow, Mrs. Hulver. Get him well first before you scold him," said Eola, turning away with more haste than she had come.

"That's all very well, miss; but as William—that was my third—used to say: 'What's the good of trying to beat the dog after you've let him loose?' Young William over there," she turned and looked towards the prostrate figure, raising her voice so that nothing should be lost to the sick man, "has got to learn his lesson; who it is that he can fight, and who he had best leave alone. As William—that was my second—used to say: 'Men are like dogs; and until they have taken the measure of their own strength against the strength of

others there can be no peace for anybody.' It was good of the sergeant to send him off at once to me. If the commanding officer had seen him in that condition there would have been trouble. William told me last time he was here that the colonel was very stiff with all offenders, especially in the matter of drink. Likely as not he has never been drunk himself and he doesn't know how easily a man may be overtook when once he gets among others in the canteen. Commanding officers, like artillery drivers, differ; one is easy with his team; another will take up every fault; but as William—that was my third—used to say: 'A regiment is like a team; it doesn't have the choosing of its own C.O. any more than a bullock chooses its driver or its road.' "

Eola made her escape at last, and when her brother came in to lunch she told him the story of Mrs. Hulver's trouble. He was not much interested, nor had he much sympathy with the foolish young man. He expressed a hope that the worthy woman would not see too much of her son. His second visit had followed very closely on his first.

"After all we mustn't forget that Mrs. Hulver, for all her excellent ways, is a Eurasian. She possesses the family loyalty that marks the race, and will never turn her back on any relative while she has a shelter to offer, no matter what the character of the individual may be."

"I am quite sure," responded Eola warmly, "that she will not allow us to be worried or out of pocket, however worried she may be herself."

“ All the same there is a strain of the ‘ soft-hearted old fool ’ about her that must not be disregarded ; and she must be protected against herself if necessary. If this boy turns up too often I shall have something to say to him. Did you see the precious young idiot himself ? ”

“ She insisted on it.”

“ Was he quiet ? ”

“ As quiet as a bad go of fever and a black eye could make him.”

“ I think I’ll have a look at him myself, and if he is fit for it I shall give him a bit of a lecture.”

“ She hasn’t spared him herself,” remarked Eola. “ He is poulticed with beef and bread and admonished with the wise sayings of the three Williams continuously. I wonder how he can take it all so quietly.”

“ Perhaps I had better defer my lecture if that is so. Any way I will go and see him. He may as well be aware of the fact that his presence here is known to us both.”

He went to the door of Mrs. Hulver’s sitting-room. It was open and revealed much the same sight as had met Eola’s eyes, except that Mrs. Hulver was in the midst of dressing the damaged eye. She held a large slice of raw meat in her hand which she was carefully adjusting over his temple and cheek, covering his eye altogether. She turned her head at the sound of the master’s footstep.

“ Is that you, sir ? I’ll come directly. This is

nearly finished. I'm changing the beef on young William's eye. Miss Wenaston told you the trouble I am in over this budmash of a boy ? ”

As she talked she adjusted the wrappings and tucked the shawl round the patient's shoulders. He was lying on his side. At the sound of the Principal's voice he stirred uneasily.

“ Now, you keep quiet, William, or you'll fidget the plasters out of place. You have got to be patient. There's a time for fighting for soldiers, and there's a time for keeping quiet, and that time is now.”

She came towards Dr. Wenaston, who had stopped on the threshold and continued, addressing herself to him instead of her son.

“ As William—that was my first—used to say : ‘ There's a season for everything. Even the bamboo must be cut when the moon is waxing or it will be good for nothing.’ ”

“ I am sorry this has occurred, Mrs. Hulver,” said the Principal, with a seriousness that would have set the pulses of his pupils going, but which had no such effect on his housekeeper. “ The hospital would have been the best place for him. He mustn't think that he can run to his mother at every bruise and scratch.”

“ It would have been a case of guardroom not hospital, sir, if it hadn't been for the kindness of the sergeant. As it is his first offence it would have been the first step towards destroying his clean sheets ; and where would have been his chance of promotion if he didn't keep

them clean? The licking he has had will do him no harm. It will teach him to keep off drink. As William—that was my third—used to say: ‘When beer goes in wisdom goes out.’ You’d like to look at him, sir. Come up to the bed. He’s too ashamed to make a salute, and his head is too bad to allow of his sitting up.”

Wenaston walked into the room, and like Eola stood for a short time by the side of the cot. He felt that it would be like hitting a man when he was down to reproach the sufferer in his present condition.

“I will see him again when he is better and have a talk with him,” he said. “You must let me know how he gets on.”

“Yes, sir; a serious talking-to will do him no end of good.” She bent over the patient and laid her hand on his head. “You need not shiver, William. The Doctor will treat you kinder than those budmashes treated you in the canteen.” She turned to Wenaston again and continued: “Lor! sir, how easy fighting comes to men in the army. It seems like a second nature to them.”

“It is their profession, Mrs. Hulver,” said Wenaston, as he moved towards the door.

“That’s exactly what William, my third, used to say. He was an Irishman and his blood was soon up. When I complained one day about his being quarrelsome with a neighbour his reply was: ‘Maria, me dear,’ he always began like that—he was such a gentleman—‘Maria, me dear; it’s second nature for soldiers to fight,

the same as it is for dogs to bark and bite. That's what the Government keeps us for; and a soldier who is worthy of the name doesn't think he is earning his pay without it.' I often used to look at the men loafing round barracks with nothing to do, and to think that in times of peace they were like chimneys that had no fire in them."

"Quite so! quite so!" said Wenaston, making his way to the door.

Mrs. Hulver followed closely with a continuous stream of remarks, from which he strove in vain to escape.

"As soon as ever young William is fit for it I'll send him to you, sir, for a good dressing-down. You must check him for his quick temper. As his own father used to say: 'A hasty man never wants for woe.' And I should be glad if you would point out the danger of drink and how it upsets the judgment. Also you might say a word or two on the folly of fighting when the odds are against you. Don't let him talk. Fill him up with as much good advice as you can get in in the time that you can spare for him. As William—that was my second—used to say: 'If counsel is good no matter who gives it.'"

"All right, Mrs. Hulver; I'll do my best," said Wenaston, as he beat a hasty retreat towards the college buildings. The housekeeper's tongue had won the day though she might not have known it, and his warning to her on softheartedness and the lecture to her son were still undelivered. However, he promised himself that

he would interview the man later on alone when he was less of an "object," as his mother expressed it, and would talk to him seriously.

Mrs. Hulver stood at her door watching the Principal as he hurried away. When he had disappeared she turned back into the room and went to the patient. Leaning tenderly over him she placed her cool soft hand on his forehead, slipping it underneath the bandages.

"Cheer up, William ; cheer up, sonnie !" she murmured. "God is where He was and He will help you through. It's no good fretting when grieving is no comfort. As William—that was my third—used to say : ' Things you can't avoid are best taken cheerfully.' No, don't try to speak. You've got to be silent till you're well, and I'll see that you're let off the master's lecture."

She called to the butler, who appeared immediately followed by the cook carrying a saucepan.

"It's all ready, ma'am."

He poured the chicken broth through a strainer into a cup and handed it to her.

"That's all right, Ramachetty," she said with approval, as she leaned over it. "That's the kind of stuff that will make my boy well. You can go. Shut the door after you. I don't wish my son to catch cold. Tell the sweeper woman to sit outside the bathroom. I shall want her later on to boil the kettle for fresh poultices."

CHAPTER XX

ON the afternoon of the same day Wenaston and his sister were at tea in the verandah when a carriage drove up and stopped just beyond the portico. Out of it stepped Sooba, Pantulu's brother. He was unknown to the Principal, who took him for the parent of one of his pupils. Wenaston rose at once, always courteous, although at times a little stiff until he was certain that no favours were going to be asked. Too often the visiting parent, after beating about the bush, would beg the Principal to promote his son in the school without due justification. Sometimes a bribe was offered. It required a great deal of patience and self-control to deal with such people ; and it was still more difficult to persuade them that promotion by favour did not advance the education of a boy but rather hindered it.

" You want to see me on business ? " asked Wenaston, advancing to meet his visitor. " Come in ; I am disengaged for ten minutes, which is all I can give you. At the end of that time I have an appointment in the college."

" I have called to ask you a favour, sir," said Sooba, in his best manner.

" You are the parent of one of my pupils ? "

“I am sorry to have to admit the fact that I have no son. It is about my nephew, Pantulu Iyer’s son, Ananda, that I have come. You engaged him as a master a short time ago. He stayed only one day.”

“Ah! now I understand. I can’t take him on the staff again, if that is what you have come to ask.”

“You are right, sir; it would be a mistake. He is unpopular in the town.”

“We have no time to lose,” said Dr. Wenaston, looking at his watch. “Will you explain what you want me to do?”

They were standing in the verandah facing each other. Sooba shuffled his feet slightly. The action said much to the Englishman and put him on his guard.

“Last night Ananda left his father’s house and we don’t know where he is.”

“Is there any reason why he should not leave Chirapore if he wishes to do so?”

“It would be without his father’s consent,” said Sooba, boldly making use of his brother’s name.

Wenaston was slightly puzzled. Ananda’s movements were not his affair.

“What do you want me to do?” he again asked, with a touch of impatience this time.

“I thought that perhaps you might give us some assistance in our search.”

The Englishman regarded him with surprise as he answered in quick decisive tones.

“I am afraid I cannot do anything of the kind. I

am too busy to spare the time. Besides, Ananda's movements really do not concern me or the college."

"It was not my intention to ask you to leave your duties, sir."

"Then how can I help in the search for the lost man? He has probably left the town, where as you yourself say he is unpopular. Under the circumstances it is the best thing that he can do. Have you inquired at the station if he were among the passengers who were travelling by the mails last night?"

"He can't have taken either of the trains, north or south, as he was seen in his room after their departure."

"Have you any suspicion where he can have gone?" asked Wenaston, trying to get at what was at the back of his visitor's mind.

There was a definite pause before the reply was given.

"We have reason to think, sir, that Ananda is here."

"Here!" repeated Wenaston, astounded and not altogether pleased. "I don't understand what you mean; what grounds you have for saying so. Have you thoroughly searched his father's house?"

"We have hunted everywhere."

"And why do you think he is here?"

Sooba was unable to explain fully; there were too many facts that had to be suppressed. One was the physical inability of the unfortunate man to go far afield in his crippled condition. The college was the only place within possible reach where the fugitive might have found a refuge. Sooba had no reliable information to

go upon ; he was acting on a suspicion arrived at by an exhaustive line of argument. It was unlikely that Bopaul's people would offer an asylum ; they would hesitate to do anything that might cause a breach between the two families. Bopaul himself might befriend him—if he could see his way to do it without giving offence. As for the rest of the town not a soul throughout would lift a finger to help an apostate to Hinduism, a man of broken caste who refused the restitution rites, an outlaw and outcaste deprived of all civil rights.

“You were so kind as to allow him to come here before, sir,” said Sooba smoothly. “We thought that he would be sure to come to you again.”

“Then you are wrong,” replied Wenaston brusquely.

He did not like the manner of his visitor in spite of the careful deference put on with a little too much show, and he resented his too ready assumption that the college would, after all that had passed during the temporary mastership, offer a shelter and again receive the 'vert. It is due to Wenaston to say that he had no suspicion that Ananda had been badly treated. Had it entered his head that there was any possibility of his being injured by assault, he would have appealed to the higher authorities of the State who would undoubtedly have interfered to protect him. The verdict of outlawry was another matter.

“How can I assure Pantulu Iyer that his son is not here, sir ? ” asked Sooba in humble anxiety.

“You have my word for it.”

“As far as your knowledge goes, sir, I would not for a moment doubt it. I venture to suggest that he may be in hiding on the premises without your knowledge.”

The school-bell rang and Dr. Wenaston made a movement.

“I must go ; and as for you, search the place if you like, college buildings, house and compound. I am positive that you will not find him. Look everywhere while you are about it, for you don’t come here a second time. You can go.”

Wenaston’s manner jarred ; it was not what Sooba had anticipated. He had assured himself that the accusation of harbouring Ananda would have troubled the Principal ; and that he would have exhibited anxiety to clear himself of the charge and show that it was not true. Sooba’s experience of the ways of Englishmen was extremely limited, and he found that he was mistaken. To be treated in this contemptuous way was galling, and roused his spite. If the fugitive should happen to be discovered on Wenaston’s premises, he promised himself that he would make it hot for the Englishman, and create a rupture between him and the governing body of the college. At the command to go there was nothing for it but to beat a retreat. He directed his steps towards the class rooms where he intended to begin his search.

“Do you really mean to allow him to go through the house ? ” asked Eola, who had listened in silence to the conversation.

“Certainly ; Ramachetty !” The butler came at once at his master’s call, so quickly that Eola smiled, in spite of her annoyance. The gist of what Sooba had said had been overheard by others besides herself. “One of Pantulu Iyer’s people——” he checked himself to ask a question—“Do you know who he is ?”

“His brother, sir.”

“His brother, is he ? He believes that his nephew Ananda is hidden somewhere on the premises. I have given him permission to search every corner of the class rooms and the house. You are to accompany him all through and show him the servants’ go-downs and the stables and garage.”

“Is he to go through your rooms as well, sir ?”

“Yes ; and Miss Wenaston’s and Mrs. Hulver’s.” He returned to Eola, upon whose face was a most unusual frown. “I shall have something to say to the Dewan about this visit.”

“It is outrageous ; and you would be quite justified in refusing to allow him to enter a single room.”

“I don’t like it any more than you do ; but I think it politic to consent. What he believes, he can make the boys believe. I wish to avoid a recurrence of the boycotting.”

“I shall go out for a drive,” said Eola.

“The best thing you can do,” replied the harassed man heartily.

Wenaston returned to his class room in the nearest approach to a rage that was possible for a man with so even a temperament. Sooba took care to avoid further

encounter ; and before the Principal reached his own lecture-room the search through that apartment had been completed. It offered no cover whatever with its bare table and desks. A runaway rat could not have hidden itself. As for a man or even a boy, the first glance round would have revealed him.

The hunt through the college buildings lasted nearly an hour. A little after five Sooba presented himself, at the house. The butler was waiting for him ; but being a pariah he was not at all to the taste of the searcher. Sooba waived him aside with all the loathing and contempt shown to a man of no caste. Ramachetty had received his directions, however, and did not budge. He begged to inform his excellency, the visitor, that he dared not disobey his master's orders ; whether his honourable excellency liked it or not he must accompany him. After this there was nothing more to be said, and the searcher began his work, leaving the butler to follow at a respectful distance.

It was with much curiosity that Sooba entered each room of the Englishman's private dwelling. Never before had he been inside a European's house. He peered under tables and chairs and looked behind curtains. The piano puzzled him, and he was not satisfied till Ramachetty had removed the front and exposed the strange wired interior that gave shelter to nothing larger than a mouse or a scorpion. Eola's rooms were also examined and drawn blank. There remained only Mrs. Hulver's.

“The housekeeper’s rooms only are left for your honour’s eye. Is it your excellency’s wish to see them also ?” asked Ramachetty.

“Decidedly ; the master gave permission for me to search every corner.”

“The housekeeper will not like it.”

“Who cares what she likes or dislikes ? She is his servant and must obey his orders.”

The butler knew his position better than to smile. He cast down his eyes demurely in case a twinkle of amusement should betray him.

“Her son is with her. He is a soldier inclined to violence. Your honour must not be angry with this slave if the soldier fights.”

The inquisitive visitor hesitated. The British soldier in the present day in India inherits a character that has been deeply impressed upon the native mind by his predecessors. It is not a character for gentleness. But the hesitation did not last long ; the spirit of prying gained the day.

“I am not afraid of a soldier. If he is violent his colonel will have him punished,” said Sooba, as he swaggered boldly up to the door of Mrs. Hulver’s room.

It stood open ; apparently she had had notice of what she might expect, for he found himself confronted by the ample figure of the wrathful woman, who understood even better than her employers the great liberty that was being taken. She glared at him with as much fire as her grey eyes were capable of showing, and

pretended not to know who he was nor what he wanted.

“Who are you, and what business have you got in my back verandah?” she asked unceremoniously, making use of the vernacular in such terms as she would have addressed one of the gardeners. “I’ve got nothing for you.”

Sooba returned an angry glance. He understood the insult, but had no means of making her smart for it.

“I have come by permission of the master of the house, the honourable Principal of the College, to look for a relative who is lost,” he replied, with as much dignity as he could muster to his aid.

“Do you suppose I have him in my pocket?”

“No, woman; but I have reason to believe that he is hiding somewhere on these premises, and I will not leave until I have thoroughly searched them.”

“Search away, then, and be quick about it. See for yourself who is here. I am not going to help you if you can’t take my word for it.”

She turned her back on him and moved into the middle of the room. As he did not follow immediately she called impatiently over her shoulder.

“Come along! Don’t stand there all the evening. What are you waiting for?”

His eyes were fixed with some anxiety on the figure extended upon the bed and a woman close by who was preparing to make a fresh poultice. She held a kettle of hot water in her hand.

“That’s my son, William, a soldier on leave from Bangalore,” remarked Mrs. Hulver, half turning to him again. “His father was a soldier and he takes after him—short in the temper and strong in the arm. You need not be afraid of him. He’s just recovering from a canteen fight in which he made a man bigger than himself—a regular giant—swallow all his front teeth; and they were his own, too.”

There was a ring of unconscious pride in the mother’s voice as she exaggerated her son’s exploits.

“I am not afraid of the soldier, woman,” replied Sooba. “The law protects me from violence. What I object to is the presence of that sweeper by his cot. She is a pariah and her presence is defiling to one of my caste.”

“Oh! is it? All the same she is my servant and she is there by my orders and there she will stay.”

The woman glanced at him with fear, and showed a disposition to abandon her work and retire in spite of “orders.” Mrs. Hulver detected the weakness. She picked up the sweeper’s broom that was lying near and pointed with it to the basin containing the bread.

“You stay where you are till I give you leave to go. Pour the hot water on to the bread. Wring out those cloths and get them ready for the poultice. As soon as I’ve seen this man through my rooms I’ll take the beef off my son’s eye and bandage it with wet rags.”

The visitor stepped gingerly into the room, sidling away from the untouchable, and began to look round.

Mrs. Hulver took no notice of him. Her attention was devoted to her son. She leaned over him, patting his pillow and touching the shawl in her solicitude for his comfort.

“ You lie quiet, William,” she said in English, “ and don’t you mind the visitor. You’ve got to get well in time to join your regiment at the end of your leave or there’ll be more trouble. You must be patient. As William, your father, used to say : ‘ Time and patience will carry a man through the roughest day.’ ”

She loosened the bandages slightly and removed a large slice of raw beef which she contemplated with broad satisfaction as it lay on the palm of her hand.

“ That’s done its work and taken down the swelling. I wish it had taken out the colour as well. We’ll see what cold water will do for you next, with a little vinegar added.” She turned to the intruder and addressed him in his own tongue, although he knew English better than Ramachetty the butler. “ Well ! why don’t you get on with your hunt for your lost cousin ? ”

She drifted towards the door by which he had entered, carrying the broom in one hand and the beef in the other. Disgust and horror were written on the face of the Hindu as he eyed the two loathsome objects, and he slipped further away moving up the room. Whether unconsciously or with deep design she had cut off his retreat completely, and there was no chance of retiring if he wished to keep his distance from the two caste-contaminating objects.

“I can’t have you here all day,” she cried, irritably. “Come! begin your search. Go and look under that table.”

She flourished the broom in the direction of a table covered with a cloth of gaudy colours where she sat to write the menus for the master’s dinner. He hesitated, his zeal had evaporated; and the object of his domiciliary visit was almost lost sight of in the contemplation of the sweeper’s broom and the flesh of the sacred cow.

“Come! get on!” continued Mrs. Hulver, moving towards him. “I want to clear the room of strangers. It’s not good for the sick man. My son is not so bad but what he can get up if he chooses and turn you out. Go and look under his bed. That’s your next place. Dearie me!” she said, lapsing into English again. “It seems as if this coolie expected me to do his work! He began with impudence, but if he doesn’t take care he’ll end with something else. As William—that was my third—used to say: ‘Dine on sauciness and you’ll sup on sorrow.’”

She took a step or two forward in the direction of her visitor. He retreated, carefully gauging the distance between his own precious person and the various un-touchable objects he had unwittingly approached. The information that the hero of the canteen fight was able to rise from his bed if he chose and act the part of chucker-out was not reassuring. He was allowed no time for reflection.

“Go and look under the bed next. Lift the blanket

that hangs down," she said to the sweeper. "Let the gentleman see that we haven't got his grandmother hidden under my son's bed."

Again she flourished the broom, this time at the woman, and she waived the raw beef at the seeker.

"Go on! Don't be afraid. William won't hurt you!"

She advanced, and Sooba, more perturbed than he had been for many a day, avoided the bed and its attendant sweeper, and backed towards the open door of the bedroom, the only available retreat afforded from this awful person. She followed and the hunter became the hunted. Armed with her terrible weapons she drove him from pillar to post, obliging him to carry out his inquisition to its last detail, and look into holes and corners with eyes that could see nothing but that caste-destroying broom and beef. After chasing him round the bedroom she forced him to enter the bathroom, where, in his confusion, he knocked over the sweeper's basket; and she kept him there whilst she explained that the place contained cover for nothing larger than a frog.

At last she let him go, and he beat an ignominious retreat, grazing his shins in his haste against the furniture. He left the sitting-room at a run, closely followed by Mrs. Hulver; and as he passed out of the door the slab of raw meat that had relieved the warrior's wounds—flung by the hand of the outraged woman—caught him in the small of his back. The sweeper's broom, hurled after the beef, rattled on his naked calves, inadvertently

exposed as, in a hurry, he gathered up his flowing muslin cloth.

William's shoulders shook. The sweeper woman hid her face in her cloth and grinned, in fearful doubt lest she was committing blasphemy in daring to smile at one of the twice-born. As for Mrs. Hulver she dropped into her capacious cane chair and let herself go. She rocked in helpless laughter, and the lounge creaked in sympathy with her movements.

"That was a sight to make you feel better, sonnie!" she said, as soon as she could speak. "The man ran like a bandicoot with its tail cut off! I wish you could have sat up and looked at him, the impudent budmash! He won't forget his visit to the college in a hurry, or my name is not Maria Hulver! I'm glad I wasn't born to run away from a bit of beef like that! He came in so proud and insolent, but he went away with a flea in his ear. As William, your father, used to say: 'There are many who go out for wool but come back shorn.' Now we'll attend to this eye."

She pulled herself together and rose from her chair. The poultice made by the sweeper was thrown away, though it was still hot.

"That was only to pass the time and keep her there, the finest bogie to frighten my lord with that I could have found! I was glad to see that you could laugh with me, sonnie. It shows you're mending."

She busied herself over his wounds with soft tender touch.

“Poor boy ! Whichever side the victory lay you didn’t get off without some hard treatment ; but we’ll soon get you well.”

“How good you are to me—mother !” replied the invalid gratefully.

“That’s right. Don’t you forget that I’m your mother. I would like to get your enemy on his bended knees and make him pray for forgiveness for knocking you about like this—a man twice your age, too ! Shame on him ! But, there ! as William—that was my third—said when the sergeant locked him up, thinking he was the worse for liquor when he wasn’t : ‘ Apologies make poor plaster.’ The sergeant was a bit hasty and he knew William’s ways and leanings. But he was wrong that time. William wasn’t drunk ; he was dazed with the sun ; and the sergeant apologised handsomely.”

That evening Wenaston once more interviewed his housekeeper.

“You showed the man who called this afternoon over your rooms, I hope, Mrs. Hulver ? ”

“Yes, sir ; I took him all round and let him see everything ; he was quite satisfied that the person he wanted wasn’t here. He didn’t mention any names.”

“He was looking for his nephew, Ananda, the young man who has become a Christian. He has disappeared, and it was thought that he might have taken refuge with us.”

“I don’t know why he should do that when he has Mr. Alderbury to go to,” remarked Mrs. Hulver indifferently.

“If by any chance he should appear you must let me know at once.”

“Would you refuse to give him shelter?” asked Mrs. Hulver, looking at the Doctor with some curiosity. As he did not reply at once she continued: “I should if I were you, sir, if you will excuse my speaking out. There’s no telling how these natives might take it if you befriended him in any way.”

“I shouldn’t drive him away if he needed protection, Mrs. Hulver,” said Wenaston. “You must understand that as a Christian he has my warmest sympathy; and that as far as I am able I will do what I can for him; but as I pointed out to you before, I am not a free agent in this matter. If he asks for assistance I will give it by sending him off at once to Mr. Alderbury, who is willing to help. What I must not do is to give him shelter in the college buildings or in the house, much as I might wish. We have tried that experiment once and it was a complete failure. Therefore I ask you to come to me immediately if Mr. Ananda should present himself.”

“Very good, sir. I don’t think he is likely to turn up after the way those boys treated him. I’m sure I have my hands full enough with young William without bothering about Mr. Ananda’s troubles. As William—that was my third—used to say: ‘Keep your eyes on your own road and don’t worry about the pitfalls of other people.’ You may depend upon me for doing the right thing and not decomposing either you or Miss Eola.”

CHAPTER XXI

PANTULU'S brother returned from his domiciliary visit to the College filled with a deep and implacable wrath. He buried it under a cheerfulness he was far from feeling. Since the discovery in the early hours of the morning that Ananda had disappeared, the house had been in a ferment of unrest. Again and again had the premises been searched. Visits were paid by various members of the family to the town and to the houses of acquaintances. More than once had a call been made at Bopaul's and guarded questions put. The market people who had arrived that morning from the country were interrogated ; clerks and porters at the railway station examined but with no better result. Help of some sort he must have had if he covered any length of distance. A few hundred yards might have been possible but progress would of necessity have been slow and painful.

Sooba was greeted on his return with a volley of questions from the men of the family. To all of them he was obliged to confess that he had failed signally.

" He is not there ; of that I am positive," he repeated over and over again.

"If he is not there, where can he be?" asked one in puzzled curiosity.

"He has joined the English missionary," said another.

"How could that be when he was unable to walk or even to stand?" inquired a third.

"Some one has befriended him and he has escaped in a passing country cart."

"Is it possible that he could have crawled to the jungle unassisted?" asked another.

"A search in the forest with village dogs will soon settle that point."

"Why not send some one to the mission house. It will be easy to discover if he has arrived. Once on British territory he need not hide any longer as we cannot touch him there. He will be lost to us for ever, and we must give up all hope of catching him. It will save trouble to know for certain if he is out of our reach."

"Good!" responded Sooba, who felt that he must take refuge in action of some kind if only to find relief for his injured feelings. "I will send a runner at once to bring news."

"There is a post office peon who has a bicycle," said one of the listeners. "For a consideration——"

"Let him be called at once," said Sooba. "He shall ask leave of absence on account of his wife's illness——"

"He is not married."

"His brother's, his mother's, any one will do!" replied Sooba, impatiently. "I will give him twenty-five

rupees if he can bring us the news by this time to-morrow."

The post peon was sent for, and in less than an hour he departed on his errand.

The temporary master of the house was in an unhappy frame of mind. Yet he had begun well. He rose in the morning feeling particularly virtuous. Success, he felt certain, must attend his efforts at recalling his nephew to his senses. All along he had urged a more severe treatment. The parents had been too lenient in drawing the line at the infliction of bodily pain. Even now if it had not been for the insult to the swami the mother would not have consented. Since it was the express order of the holy man she could not do otherwise than allow things to take their course; but it had been considered advisable to keep Pantulu himself in ignorance.

When Sooba had performed his domestic puja, as became the head of the family, he went to Ananda's room. The disappearance of the late occupant was a shock from which he had not recovered; and his visit to the Principal's house and the College only served to increase the disturbance of his mind. It was not so much the failure of his search as the memory of the indignities to which he had been subjected by the woman who ruled the household. Had the incidents that occurred in the housekeeper's room been witnessed by any member of his family or by a fellow caste man, they would have been magnified into serious breaches

necessitating ceremonial purification. This would have entailed expenses which, not being a rich man himself, he would fain avoid. He did his best to school himself into the belief that he was mistaken ; that in his confusion at finding himself in the presence of an angry woman and a sick soldier of admittedly bad temper, he imagined that he saw signs of the untouchable.

After some hours of brooding he succeeded in persuading himself that he had not been within the prescribed distance of the loathsome objects. A little more concentration and he arrived at the comfortable conviction that he was altogether deceived by a too vivid imagination which had played him false. His caste had never been in jeopardy for a single moment.

The disappearance of Ananda was not so easily dealt with. The fact could not be ignored. The more he thought over it, the more he came to look upon the escape as an insult directed against himself. He was the master of the house in his brother's absence. It was a piece of gross impertinence for any member of the family to leave without permission. It was setting at naught his authority and treating him with contempt. The more he contemplated the incidents of the last twenty-four hours, the greater grew the conviction that there must be a reckoning with some one. Properly speaking it should be Ananda himself, for he was the origin of all that had occurred, including the disrespect experienced in Dr. Wenaston's house ; but his nephew's absence precluded any possibility of settling with him in person.

Sooba thereupon turned his attention to Mrs. Hulver. Was there any means of making her feel the weight of his displeasure ? He took the trouble to inform himself of her habits and mode of life. She seldom left the house except to go to market in the morning. As the town possessed no English church, Dr. Wenaston held a service for himself and a few English people in Chirapore, in a room fitted up as a chapel in the Residency. Thither Mrs. Hulver went on Sundays in the motor. To attack her and offer violence in the market would simply mean police and imprisonment. She was never without the faithful Ramachetty, the cook, and the kitchen coolie who carried the purchases. In the motor, seated with Miss Wenaston, she was safe from every kind of assault.

Brooding over the mystery of how Ananda escaped, who befriended him, and how he, Sooba, was to taste revenge, the evening meal was eaten and he retired to his pillow.

The next morning the search was renewed, the seekers going further afield into the glades and woods of the mountain. Woodcutters, herdsmen and cultivators were questioned ; but not a sign had been found of the missing man. Later in the day the cyclist returned with the news that the fugitive was not at the mission station. Moreover, Mr. Alderbury was away on tour out of reach of the railway. It was impossible that Ananda could have joined him on the road. Even the peons carrying letters and supplies were no longer following him up. He was trusting to the villages through which he was

itinerating to sell him milk, butter, eggs and fowls ; and it was not known exactly where he was.

If Ananda was not in hiding at the College, nor at the mission house, nor with the missionary himself where could he be ?

This was the question faced by the whole family as they drank their morning coffee and ate the freshly-made, unleavened rice cakes.

An elderly woman, experienced in the inner workings of the caste families of Chirapore, breathed the word "well." It was an inspiration, and the suggestion was caught up at once. Undoubtedly it was the well. The premises contained no less than three wells ; one for the use of the house, deep and containing a never-failing supply of pure water ; a second near the cattle shed, and a third—more of the nature of a pond—used only for the garden.

An examination of the wells followed immediately. Two hours later the household was electrified by the news that Ananda's tweed cap had been found in the well near the cattleshed. The well was deep ; means for probing its depths were not available. One of the herdsmen was lowered in the leather bucket, and he discovered the cap hanging from a protruding root in the masonry of the wall. He was about to enter the water to dive for the body when he caught sight of a snake. In terror he signalled to those above to draw him up at once ; and after hearing his tale no one could be persuaded to continue the exploration.

Sooba regarded the cap with a grim satisfaction which he took care to conceal under an expression of consternation and regret. If Ananda chose to drown himself who could help it? It was a fitting end to a perverse and wicked line of conduct. He had caused the death of his child; the exile of his parents with the probable death of his father; and now he would be the cause of further disgrace to the family in the introduction of a widow.

He presented himself at the kitchen door where his wife, full of importance, was hustling the women through their appointed tasks. She answered his summons at once, and inquired deferentially what it was that troubled the master of the house. The busy hands ceased to pound and grind and stir as each person listened open-eyed to the story of the search and the discovery of the cap in the well by the cattle-shed.

"He is undoubtedly drowned and in three or four days we shall find his body. This is a terrible calamity for his widow."

His glance passed beyond his wife and rested on the figure of Dorama, who stood transfixed with horror at the story just told. As she met his eye, in which, in spite of all his self-restraint, a malicious triumph was revealed, she dropped to the ground covering her face with her hands and moaned in the bitterness of her heart.

"It will be advisable for us to carry out the ceremonies as soon as possible. They should be completed

before my brother returns so that he may be saved the additional grief of seeing what can only bring before him more vividly all that has gone before."

No need for Dorama to ask what those ceremonies were. They did not concern the body of the dead man but her own person. She shuddered as she crouched before the curry stone on which she was working in the preparation of green chutney, the task assigned to her regularly by her aunt.

"When shall we perform them?" asked Sooba's wife, her eyes resting upon the beautiful gold boss that adorned Dorama's glossy hair. "It is usual to wait ten days from the date of the death."

"This is not a common case. To us and to his parents Ananda has been as good as dead ever since he landed. There can be no funeral rites even when his body is found. He has died an outcaste, defiled and unpurified, and as such he must be buried—not burned—at night with shame and dishonour and with no ceremonies. My brother must not return till we have disposed of the dead man and completed the ceremonies of widowhood. They shall take place three days hence which will give us time to call together the friends of the family. You will also have time to prepare for their entertainment. My brother will wish it done well and no expense spared."

"And if the body is not found by that time, what then?" asked his wife.

"The rites must be performed all the same. I, the

master of the house in my brother's absence, give the order."

He raised his voice although it was not necessary. It penetrated to the very end of the kitchen and not a word was lost to the many pairs of listening ears. If ears were directed towards the acting master of the house, eyes found another centre of attraction in the crushed figure by the curry-stone. Pity struggled in their fatalistic minds, but in none was it strong enough to cause a stretching out of the hand in sympathy, nor to sound the note of consolation or comfort. There was silence as Sooba walked away. Although his head was bent and his features wore a sufficiently solemn expression, he was inwardly triumphant and full of satisfaction. At last he had found an object on whom he might be revenged ; on whose devoted head he might with safety retaliate. As he had suffered indignity and disrespect, so now she should have the same measured out tenfold. In the absence of the man himself it was meet that his wife should feel the weight of his displeasure. The probability of Ananda being still alive was set aside. As he desired so he chose to believe, and on that belief he intended to take action with as little delay as was possible.

That afternoon Bopaul with Mayita in attendance, strolled into the compound with the intention of looking up Ananda. Leaving the girl under the trees near the wall, where she was partially hidden from view—lest the sight of her should prove an offence to the family—

he turned towards Ananda's room. The green gourd outside in the little yard had produced some shapeless succulent fruit. It continued to send up an abundance of loose yellow cups of flowers to the sun, and though there had been very little rain of late the foliage maintained its emerald tint.

The door of the room was ajar. Bopaul called Ananda by name as was his wont ; but receiving no reply he entered. The place was deserted. Except for the two portmanteaux it was devoid of all sign of the owner. Hitherto on the occasion of his visits he had seen books and writing material lying about ; a coat thrown over a chair ; cap and walking-stick on the table. Nothing of the kind was visible, and he wondered what had happened. Had his friend decided to go, and managed to slip away after all ? Yet he could not have gone far nor for long ; the presence of his luggage testified to the fact that he intended to return.

In the midst of his speculations a member of the family arrived sauntering in with unconcern.

"You are looking for Ananda. We saw you come in and guessed that you would be here."

"Where is he ?" asked Bopaul, in surprise.

"He is dead ; drowned in the well near the stable."

Bopaul expressed his consternation and regret, and asked how the accident had occurred. The man laughed unsympathetically, in a manner that grated on the feelings of the visitor.

"The wonder is that it has not happened before. It

was not an accident. He threw himself into the well at night when we were all asleep. It was the best way out of the difficulty that he himself had created by turning Christian. It will prevent further trouble and vexation, even though it saddles the family with a widow."

"Have the funeral rites been performed?"

"How can an outcaste receive the funeral rites of an orthodox Hindu?" the other asked contemptuously.

"He has been burned, then, without them?" said Bopaul, regarding the man with increasing displeasure. He did not like the tone adopted. "It is strange we have heard nothing of the affair."

"There has been no burning and no burial for the excellent reason that we have not yet recovered the body from the well."

"It has been seen, of course?"

"His cap has been found."

"Have you only his cap as evidence?"

"Isn't that sufficient? The master considers it ample, and he and his wife are already beginning to make preparations for the ceremony of breaking the bangles and shaving the widow's head."

"Is that so? Surely it is full early for the widow rites when the body of her husband is still missing?"

"If he were a respectable Hindu, religious and obedient to the law of caste, it might be a trifle early; but in this case the man has been dead to the family ever since his return from England. It was a cursed day on which his father consented to his crossing the

black water. Alive or dead the sooner his position is recognised, and his wife treated accordingly, the better pleased shall we all be."

"I don't believe Ananda is dead," remarked Bopaul, after a few seconds' consideration. "He is not the man to commit suicide. It is far more likely that he has gone away in the night and has made his escape from those who waited for him with no kindly intentions."

"Run away or dead, it is all the same," persisted the other. "And as for his wife she would have become as truculent as himself. Did you hear how she tried to escape with him? We discovered her absence on the night the child died and followed her. They were brought back together; and as a reward for his pains Ananda was beaten by order of his uncle."

"Beaten! Surely his father did not give his consent to such an extreme course?"

"The big master was not asked and he knew nothing about it. He became sick after the child's funeral, and he has gone to one of his silk-farms ten miles away. He knows nothing and he cares nothing. His spirit is broken by the wickedness of his son, who deserves all that we gave him."

"Possibly Ananda has joined his father," suggested Bopaul, who refused absolutely to believe in the theory of suicide.

"Not he! The stick fell too long and too heavily—for we all took turns—to leave him with strength or

spirit to run away again. After we had finished with him he could not stand."

Bopaul turned away; he was disgusted with the openly expressed brutality of the speaker; and he was profoundly sorry for his friend. All along he had feared that something of this kind would occur. The ways of caste families were familiar to him. His own people would have pursued the same course had he become an apostate from Hinduism. He stopped to ask another question.

"You are sure that he was unable to leave the compound after——" he paused, unable to frame the expression. The other understood.

"Quite certain; the man was too sore to put one foot before the other," he replied with a hard laugh.

"How do you suppose he got to the well?"

"On his hands and knees, of course."

"And the widow ceremonies will take place three days hence?"

"Without fail, knowing how set upon the business Sooba is."

Bopaul walked back to his sister deep in thought. The news troubled him. He was helpless in the matter, and could do nothing. He wished that he had brought more pressure to bear upon his friend when the offer came from Alderbury. That was a golden opportunity missed that was not likely to occur again—always supposing that Ananda was still alive. That he was dead,

and by his own hand, was impossible of belief the longer he considered it.

Mayita was still playing happily enough. She was in the middle of an imaginary wedding. A datura blossom was the bride and a wood-apple the bridegroom ; she was playing the part of the go-between, and was negotiating the dower. When she saw her brother she hid the happy couple in the folds of her rough cloth, whispering to the bridegroom that his joy should not be long delayed.

“Come, little one,” said Bopaul. “We must go home to our mother. You will soon have a companion to play with.”

“I! who will have the courage to play with a widow in the face of the gods?” she asked sadly.

“One who will be in the same sad case as yourself, child.”

“Another widow! I will not play with her! Is it not enough to have me in the house? We do not want a second widow to double our ill-luck. Only this morning the eldest son of our cousin met me by the cowhouse, not knowing that my mother had sent me for some milk. He cursed me; but all the same two hours later as he was running through the garden a thorn entered his foot and made him lame. I thought his mother would have beaten me; she was so angry; she said it was all my fault. I hid till you called me; I was so frightened, too frightened to eat any breakfast; so

I am very hungry now. No ! no ! brother ! we want no more widows in our house."

"She will not live with us."

"Who is she ? " asked Mayita, her curiosity aroused.

"Ananda's widow."

"Aiyoh ! Is it possible that Ananda is dead !"

"Anyway his wife is a widow and the ceremonies take place three days hence."

"Poor Dorama ! Aiyoh ! poor Dorama !"

CHAPTER XXII

LITTLE news was received from Pantulu Iyer and his wife. It was conjectured that there was none to impart. If he became decidedly worse the family at Chirapore would be duly informed ; but if he only continued to drift gradually down the hill nothing would be said. Sooba and his wife, ever ready to believe as they hoped, made up their minds that the head of the house could not last much longer, and that the younger brother would soon be called upon to perform those ceremonies which should belong to the son, the performance of which established the right of the performer to be recognised as head of the house. Could they have glanced at the presumably dying man they would have sustained a shock.

Contrary to all expectation Pantulu was improving in health every day. He recovered his appetite as well as his strength and spirits with a readiness that astonished his wife. Away from his home and surrounded by new interests he shook off the terrible depression caused by his son's conversion to Christianity. A reaction was setting in, enabling him to detach his thoughts from the trouble and centre them elsewhere.

The silk farm was one of his early ventures, when, as a young man, he had tried with considerable success to improve the culture of silk-worms. The system he introduced answered so well that it was generally adopted throughout the silk-growing districts, with the result that a finer and stronger silk was produced. Perfection, however, was not attained, and of late years there had been a forward movement in the Far East which again placed the silk of Chirakul in the background. The relative in charge of the farm was an enthusiast in his way, and he was delighted to find that in Pantulu he had a ready and sympathetic listener. He was quite sure that further improvement might be effected in the boiling of the cocoons and the bleaching of the silk. He had made a few experiments himself and he exhibited the results with some pride. Together they pored over the evil-smelling stuff that was one day to robe a woman's dainty form, and exhale nothing but the atta of rose and sandal-wood with which it should be scented. It was a good strand of silk, but the tint, a dull stain, would only take crude strong dyes, that lost their brilliancy and purity through the stain.

The manager of the farm had recently been to Bombay where he had met some silk growers from China. Though these men were reticent and jealous of imparting their knowledge to foreigners, he managed to extract some information and to gather that more might be learned by a visit to China and Japan. Since his return he had made the attempt to improve the

silk ; and though the result left much to be desired, it was sufficiently encouraging to show the old expert that the experiment should be pursued.

The second day after his arrival Pantulu spent the morning over the caldrons ; and when summoned to the midday meal he entered the little bungalow with a firm, brisk step that bespoke an unusual readiness for dinner, and a line of thought that was free from anxiety. Gunga looked up from the steaming pot of rice which she was manipulating and glanced at her husband with surprise. If this was the result of a return to work it should not be her fault if the cure was not completed.

Always prompt and unusually practical for a woman of her nation, she made a startling proposition that very afternoon. It was nothing less than the despatch of the manager to China and Japan on a tour of inspection, that he might examine thoroughly into the methods of silk-growing and preparation for the dyers' vat. She suggested that Pantulu himself should manage the farm during his absence. The cousin's wife and family were to remain on the estate and keep house as usual. Every now and then Gunga would go over to Chirapore and see that all was going well. Meanwhile Sooba and his wife would represent the head of the family and look after the business in the town.

The proposal was received by the two men with approval. Pantulu's eyes grew bright as he considered the plan ; and at her question as to whether he felt strong enough for the work that it would involve, he

drew himself up to his full height and assured her that it would make a new creature of him. The change of air had already wrought wonders and she must not look upon him as an old man past all business.

“My brother will be surprised when he hears the news,” remarked Pantulu with a new pride in his rejuvenation.

“This is not to be spoken of at present,” said Gunga with authority. “I have other plans connected with it, and until they are more forward I wish for secrecy ; for I will have no interference ; none !”

Her lips closed firmly, and Pantulu knew of old that when his wife was determined on any course of action nothing moved her from her course.

“What are they, wife ?” he asked, with a smile of amusement. “May we of this house be told ?”

“If you can keep your tongues quiet. Our cousin’s wife, here, is a Mahratta woman who knows Bombay. She has suggested that we should send our son there to act as agent for the sale of our produce. She says that though he is lost to our religion, he need not be lost to the family business. Many people of caste in Bombay have joined the Brahmo Somaj and the Arya Somaj and a few have become Christians. With all these changes before their eyes the people of Bombay feel less bitterness towards the men who take up a new faith than those of a state like Chirapore ; and there is no persecution. The English Government protects them all.”

Pantulu did not reply immediately, and Gunga continued to unfold plans that were to include the obstinate son and a compromise. She paused to take breath and he spoke.

“The difficulty over the shraddah ceremonies will still remain, the rites by which my ancestors and I may escape the lower rebirths.”

Gunga looked at him and pursed up her lips as though she had by no means exhausted her resources.

“Our cousin’s wife has proposed a remedy for that.”

He glanced at her with questioning eyes that showed how near to his heart the subject and consequent anxiety lay. Before he could frame the query as to ways and means she continued.

“The time has not arrived yet to talk about it. First and foremost, husband, you are the chief consideration. You must get well and strong. For that purpose there is nothing like work and food and change of air, as I have told you more than once. Here you will have all that is necessary.”

“What shall we tell my brother?”

“Leave that to me. I will dictate a letter saying that it will be advisable for you to remain here, and praying him to look well after your interests at Chirapore. When I go back, which I shall do before long, I will explain more.”

Pantulu was well content to leave everything in his wife’s hands. The new venture had taken hold of his mind, and it dominated every other consideration. At

the bottom of it lay money ; and though his wealth was great already, " Gold " had a reviving effect upon the man, as the word " rats " had upon the sick terrier.

On the day appointed for the ceremonies to take place, which were to brand Ananda's wife with the curse of Hindu widowhood, a large party assembled at Pantulu's family mansion in Chirapore. Relatives accompanied by relatives arrived from all parts of the State. Gossip circulated freely. News was given and demanded ; and many were the questions asked concerning the absent master and mistress. Sooba was ready with his tale, adorned and coloured according to his imagination without much regard to the truth. Gunga's letter had been received ; and as she made no allusion to her husband's health it seemed safe to assume that there was no improvement.

" My sister-in-law asks me to consider myself the head of the house as long as my brother is absent. She says that it is best for him to remain where he is ; it will give him a better chance of recovery," he said.

" Then there is hope that he may get well ? " asked one of the guests.

" She may have hope herself ; we do not entertain much. It is more than likely that he is too sick to move."

" How long do you think he will last ? " enquired another.

" A few weeks at the outside," replied Sooba. " The

news of the disappearance of his son will probably hasten his end."

"Has it been sent yet?"

"Not yet; we are waiting till this ceremony is finished. It would be very bad for him if he insisted on returning for it; so we have thought it best to get it all over before mentioning anything."

It was very gratifying to be treated as the master of the house. Sooba revelled in the situation, and swaggered about among his guests as if he already owned his brother's wealth. It all helped to sooth the wounded self-esteem; and to soften the memory of the insults he had received at the hands of Mrs. Hulver.

The afternoon had been chosen for the ceremony; but ever since daybreak active preparations had been in progress. The victim had undergone ceremonial ablutions; her hair had been combed and oiled and her whole person scented. The long glossy strands of hair were plaited and in the plaits were woven white jasmine blossoms. Gold ornaments freshly burnished were fastened on her head and in her ears and nostrils.

A close-fitting jacket of crimson satin and a rich tawny silk saree the colour of wall-flowers enfolded her figure. Round her neck hung four beautiful necklaces of pearl and gold and precious stones, all of which had adorned Gunga on her wedding day many years ago. Ankles and wrists were laden, and Dorama's slender fingers were filled to the first joint with rings that were heirlooms. Her forehead was rubbed with sweet

sandalwood paste, her lips touched with rouge, and the beautiful brown eyes intensified in size by dark touches beneath them. They needed no pungent juices to make them bright. The unshed tears were sufficient to keep them moist.

The assembled guests had had time to dine and afterwards to talk over all the news. Many had paid a visit to the well down which they glanced morbidly at the root where the cap was found hanging. By half past three the waiting began to grow irksome, and enquiries were made for the widow. She was coming! they were told. It had taken long to fasten all the jewels. There were so many! not one worn on the wedding day was missing; and in addition she wore others that were purchased for her when her son was born.

The mention of little Royan was the signal for sighs and lamentations. They were interrupted by the appearance of Dorama led by her aunt. Dressed as when she was given to her husband she stood before them, her eyes downcast and brimming with tears, her delicate fingers plucking nervously at the folds of her saree.

At the sight of her the women burst into open wailing. Some of them pressed forward and cracked the joints of their knuckles over her head as though they would still try to avert her hideous fate. Others kissed her cheek and hair, her soft arms, even the gold embroidered edge of her saree. Tears flowed freely; the sight of

the grief of others opened the fountain of her own sorrow, and Dorama wept with them.

It was a pathetic sight ; the girl dressed in bridal array for the last time in her young life, and the sympathetic company bewailing her fate.

A golden ray of the afternoon sun shot slanting downwards into the courtyard and caught the gleaming jewellery, reddening the rich tint of her silk garment, and warming the lights in the precious metal. Here a crimson ruby sent out a shaft of fire ; there a green emerald and blue sapphire set in gold completed the rainbow colours.

The company revelled in the luxury of grief and prolonged the leave-taking, repeating over and over again their sorrow and regret that the gods had dealt thus hardly with her. Then as the sun drew down towards the west, she was led by her uncle and aunt through the little yard and into Ananda's room. The company followed, and the space was quickly filled with the throng of sightseers still wailing and weeping without restraint. The green foliage of the gourd was trodden down ; its fruit and yellow blossoms were crushed under careless feet as the crowd pressed forward to see the degrading rites that were to be carried out by the two relatives who had constituted themselves master and mistress of the ceremonies.

First the jewels were removed. One by one they were unclasped and handed to members of the family to be held in safe keeping till they could be restored to

the jewel chest. Every woman rich or poor wears a few dark bangles of glass. Among the golden cirelets on her arms Dorama had three or four such rings on each wrist. With every movement the bangles clinked musically as they fell against the gold bracelets. Armed with a stone her aunt seized her by the hand and struck the brittle glass sharply. At the sound of the blows the wail of grief was again raised. This was the first act in the tragedy.

Denuded of all her adornments she was next disrobed. The coloured jacket was removed; the silk saree unwound from her limbs. A coarse rough cloth of unbleached cotton was produced and twisted round her figure. Widowhood permitted but one garment; nevermore would she be allowed to wear jacket or petticoat or any soft material that might protect her sensitive skin from the rough web of the cotton saree. This was the second act.

The third, by far the worst part of the ordeal, was still to come. Her abundant hair was unplaited slowly and the sweet jasmine blossoms that had been woven into it dropped upon the ground at her feet, where they lay all unheeded, contaminated and cursed by the touch of the widow. Again the women crowded closely, some of them lifting the tresses to their lips, with lamentations that one so young and beautiful should meet with such misfortune.

In the light of the sunset glow the scissors shone as the hand of the barber woman was raised to perform

her share of the ceremony. The hair that reached far below Dorama's waist was gathered in none too gentle a grip and severed close against the head. Not content with this, custom demanded the use of the razor. As the sunlight faded behind the purple mountain, Dorama's head was disfigured beyond recognition. A fresh cry of grief rose from the assembled crowd, as they stared with growing repulsion at the sight. The only dry eyes were those of the temporary master of the house and his wife.

One more ceremony remained to be performed. This was the severing of the marriage cord on which the badge corresponding with the European woman's wedding ring hung. Dorama felt the cord press against the back of her neck as her aunt drew it tight the better to divide it. As it parted the tension relaxed and the gold badge dropped into the hand extended by her uncle to receive it.

With a despairing cry Dorama fell upon her knees, and leaning forward touched the ground with her forehead as if in resignation to the will of the gods. Round her lay the scattered jasmine blossoms that had dropped from her hair. In their death they exhaled their sweetness on the evening air. They were no longer the adornment of the bride but the offering to one who was to suffer a living death. Nevermore would the sight of the wax-white flowers remind her of a happy expectant bridegroom. Thenceforth they would speak only of death and misery.

It is strange how the Hindu who is extravagant in his grief, piles up pain and sorrow for poor suffering humanity. As if the gods had not brought sufficient wretchedness on the unhappy wife by the loss of her husband, he devises in his inhuman ingenuity this barbarous method of enhancing the sorrow that is already almost too great for endurance. When the girl is dressed up for the last time and appears before the assembly she is greeted with profound pity. As the ceremonies proceed that pity gradually emerges into loathing and contempt. The woman herself with all her sweetness and gentleness is forgotten, and her widowhood only is remembered. She enters upon an existence that is absolutely without a relieving ray of hope. She is often the drudge of the house ; she has no rights moral or otherwise ; and she is at the mercy of the most tyrannical woman of the household and the most licentious man. Her only chance of escape is in death ; but even death has no promise of greater happiness. Her rebirth on earth will, according to her faith, only plunge her in deeper misery and degradation.

How such an appalling custom can have arisen out of the past ages it is difficult to say ; and it is still more puzzling to understand why it is maintained among a people who are neither savage nor uncivilized. No other nation has anything to offer that is its equivalent in refined and far-reaching cruelty. Never a day passes but the rites are performed somewhere throughout

the length and breadth of India. Never a night goes by that does not see some stricken girl or woman grovelling on the floor of her chamber in abject misery alone and un comforted. Too often the misery is ended by a catastrophe, a rush towards the well ; a plunge and then stillness.

And what then ? Does any one care ? Not in the least. Even the mother of the girl sheds no tear and makes no lamentation. The house is relieved of the presence of the ill-starred widow, a certain source of misfortune, and her removal is a blessing for which the gods are thanked.

One by one the company drifted away, some to depart at once for their homes, others to indulge in fragments of gossip in the back verandah. The place was empty at last of all save the prostrate figure lying among the jasmine blossoms in the room where, only a few nights ago, she had crept into the arms of a loving husband. The gourd was crushed and trampled to death in the yard ; the glory of its green leaves and yellow cups was as ruthlessly destroyed as her own crown of womanhood.

A cicala in the grass outside began his evening note of challenge. It was answered by the metallic defiance of a rival. A pair of little flycatchers slipped into their roosting place in the oleander bush at the entrance, with complaining chirrups at having been kept up so late by the invasion of the yard. A pale, yellow moth fluttered like a ghost over the jasmine flowers, puzzled

at its inability to draw honey from what had been done to death. The hum of the town, busy with its evening trading, came faintly through the stillness of the air and died down again; and the peace of approaching night dropped softly on the earth.

Not one of that numerous family gave a second thought to the stricken woman whom they had left. Not a soul returned to offer consolation. Their actions faithfully indicated their minds. No one cared what became of the widow; no one heeded her steps. Under her ban she was free to come and go as she chose. From thenceforth she need have no fear of lock and key; unless it might be for the purpose of keeping her out of sight of her more fortunate fellows.

In earlier days Dorama had wondered how Mayita had been able to bear the fate that had overtaken her. She recalled the fact that she had herself shrunk from the baldheaded child, and avoided a meeting without any attempt at disguising her action. And now she was in exactly the same case herself! ah! she could not bear it. It was intolerable; a moan broke from her lips as the reality of the present separated itself from the shadows of the past. She writhed in rebellion against her fate, and as she did so she felt the iron of the inevitable enter her soul.

It was unbearable. She could not face it! Cost what it might she must escape!

There was but one way. She knew it, as she had heard it spoken of when other women suffered the same

fate. Yes; they were right. Death was preferable to life under such conditions. Her beloved husband had sought for death in the well. If she ran quickly, and hurled herself over the low wall before she had time to look into the black cold depths, she could find courage enough to carry out the design without faltering. It would be best too for the house, and relieve it of the disastrous presence of a widow. Royan was gone; Ananda was gone; it was only fitting that she should go too.

She rose to her feet determined to act at once before her courage failed her. She turned and staggered blindly to the entrance that admitted the faint starlight of the night. As her foot crossed the threshold she felt a pair of small arms thrown around her.

“Dorama! sister, it is I! Coomara’s widow! I have come to join my tears with yours!”

And promptly Mayita buried her face in the coarse new saree of her sister-widow and gave full rein to her grief.

Dorama felt like a drowning waif who had abandoned hope, and to whom was suddenly held out a friendly hand. She clung passionately to Mayita, trembling and catching her breath in dry sobs.

“Sit down, sister,” said Mayita presently. “Let us talk. No one cares where the widow is, nor what she does. Listen; I have news for you. This morning they put ladders down the well by the cattle shed where your husband’s cap was found. They searched for his

body with hooks and nets, but they found nothing. If he is there he lies like a stone at the bottom. Some say that as he turned Christian he cannot come up. The devil living in the well has eaten him. My brother laughs and says they are all mistaken. He is not there."

"Not there!" cried Dorama startled. Then as the flicker of hope momentarily kindled died down she added: "But if not there, where can he be?"

"He has gone to the missionary, the good Englishman, who will be a father to him."

"Impossible! He could not stand, far less walk, after the beating that they gave him; and he had no friends."

"My brother assures me that he is alive and he means to make sure of it by secret inquiry. Oh, Dorama! dear sister! I am so sorry for you. But listen! Beloved!—I may call you so now. Beloved! it is so sweet to have a sister! I have been so lonely since my evil fate overtook me. Oh! so lonely! With only the good Bopaul to say a kind word to me. Even my mother hates the sight of me, and curses me because I bring bad luck to the house."

There was a pause during which the two girls clung together.

"Sister!" whispered Mayita striving to catch sight of the other's face in the dim light. "Sister, where were you going when you fell into my arms?"

Dorama did not reply, but suddenly she began to

moan. Mayita strove to comfort her, and when the agitation lessened she began again.

“Sister! you were going to the well. It must not be. You must live lest by any chance your husband comes to life again. It will be hard, oh, very hard sometimes, almost more than one can bear. But for his sake it must be borne; for, if he ever does come back, it will assuredly send him to the well if he finds that you are dead. Promise me, sister; promise me that you will not go to the well.”

“I promise, little one!” replied Dorama brokenly.

“That’s right! Now it is time for me to go back.”

“Alone, little sister?”

“My brother waits for me by the gateway. He is so good! oh, so good to the poor widow. May the blessing of all the gods I have offended rest for ever on his dear head.”

Dorama watched her white figure till it was lost in the darkness of the night. Then she turned her face towards the garden entrance and passed unnoticed into the house. They who happened to be near the path she took in crossing the courtyard, stepped aside so as to place themselves well out of reach of possible contact with her shadow. Others seeing her coming turned back into the room they were leaving, and closed the door till she should have passed.

When the evening meal was served out, knowing too well what was expected of her, she remained outside the family circle until all had finished, including

the youngest and most insignificant child of the establishment. Then and then only did she—who among the women had been formerly helped immediately after the big mistress and before her aunt—received her portion. It was ample and sufficing; but it was eaten in bitter humiliation and anguish of heart, as she realised the dreadful fact that this was only the beginning of a lifelong existence from which there could be no escape.

CHAPTER XXIII

A WEEK passed during which Pantulu's family settled back into the ordinary routine. Sooba was gratified by the performance of the widowing ceremonies ; he felt to a certain degree revenged upon his unfortunate nephew. The adulation received from the visitors did something to restore his wounded vanity ; but the disrespect shown by Dr. Wenaston's housekeeper was not yet atoned for ; and his vindictiveness in that direction continued to smoulder.

A second letter arrived from Gunga asking for news of Ananda. It contained a message that amounted to a parental order. Gunga desired her son to come to her at once. She suggested that by this time the popular feeling against him in the town would have subsided ; and it would be quite safe for him to travel in the bullock coach which had taken her and her husband to their new home. She went into further detail about the proposed journey, and asked that some personal property should be forwarded by the conveyance that brought her son. Sooba read the letter aloud to his wife in his perplexity.

"It means that my brother is worse and he wants to make one more appeal to his son," he commented.

"You will have to tell him that Ananda is dead."

"I shall do nothing of the kind—at present. It is strange that the well refuses to give up the body."

"Not at all, husband. The gods have permitted the demon of the well to do its worst. Perhaps one day his bones may be brought to light; but we shall never see his body again."

"As far as we are all concerned it would be a good thing if he were never seen again. It would solve the difficulty of funeral ceremonies," remarked Sooba complacently.

"Does our sister say nothing about Dorama?"

"Nothing at all."

"If she knew she would ask for the jewels. You have them all safe?"

"Perfectly safe."

"Why not replace them in the family chest?" she asked, a touch of anxiety in her voice.

"Because I choose to keep them myself."

She was silent in spite of her uneasiness. She was aware that Sooba had not only taken possession of the jewels, but had also appropriated some of the money recently paid in by the middle-men who purchased the produce of Pantulu's estate. They brought rupee notes and took Sooba's receipt without a suspicion of anything wrong. Sooba himself saw no harm in his action.

He was a little premature ; but as it would all be his at no distant time there was nothing dishonest about it.

“ What answer shall you send ? ”

“ I shall say that we gave Ananda the punishment commanded by the swami, taking care not to be too severe.”

“ It was very severe all the same. Sometimes I think that he may have crawled away into the jungle and died there.”

“ Chah ! woman ! you babble like a fool ! ” retorted Sooba with irritation. “ We are speaking now of what is to be said to our sister. In return for our leniency—for not having given him the full measure prescribed by the holy one—— ”

“ The men said that it was more than—— ”

“ Peace, idiot ! Let me finish what I intend to say to my sister-in-law. In return for our kindness he has gone off, we can’t say where. He tried to entice away the foolish deluded Dorama and persuade her to go with him ; but we discovered the plan just in time to stop her.”

His wife was not satisfied. She had no objection to the distortion of the tale. What she feared was the discovery of the truth by Gunga. The story of the widow ceremony must come to her ears before many more days were passed ; and nothing would be gained by rousing her wrath unnecessarily. As long as there was a breath of life in Pantulu, Gunga ruled absolutely ; and it was in her power to turn out Sooba and his wife if serious offence were given.

“Leave it to me,” said Sooba confidently and untroubled by any qualms of conscience. “Our sister is occupied in looking after her husband. Her own approaching widowhood will take up the rest of her thoughts. We need not fear that she will make inquiry or trouble about anything until the end comes. Then I in the absence of Ananda will be chief mourner and master of the house. It will be your voice and not our sister’s that will hold the attention of the zenana. The jewels may be worn by you ; they will become you well, wife.”

She was not satisfied even with this rosy dream of wealth and authority, and she asked uneasily :

“When will you tell Gunga of her son ? ”

“In another week perhaps I may begin to break the news.”

The days that followed the widowing rites passed strangely for Dorama. She hated her new position and inwardly revolted against it. She loathed her rough garment and bare head. The cool evening wind caught her behind the ears and at the back of her neck—where formerly the heavy strands of hair formed a covering—and gave her twinges of neuralgia. She shivered and drew up the saree shawl-wise over her head, but it slipped down having nothing to cling to. She missed the daily details of her toilet. There was no hair to comb, and scent, and plait with fresh blossoms ; no jewels to fasten on arm and neck. She was not permitted to use any of the various cosmetics treasured in the brass box with

its many divisions that was her own special property ; the rouge, sandal-wood paste, saffron powder, lip-salve, henna and the sweet atta of rose. The only thing allowed was the use of pure water. The food was good ; but the mode of serving deprived her of appetite. By the time her turn came she was so full of misery and impatience at her altered circumstances, that she found no pleasure in eating the excellent curry prepared in the kitchen. Alone and like a guilty thing she bolted her meals, sometimes shedding bitter tears as she did so. Even the luxury of grief was denied. If tears were seen or a sob heard, she was reproved. Did she want to bring bad luck upon the house ? she was asked. If a basin was broken or a pot upset, angry glances were directed towards her. If the woman slicing vegetables cut her finger, she showed it to the widow with an injured expression, as much as to say : Look at the effect of having a person like you in the house !

Her services were not urgently needed in the kitchen where many hands made light work ; and it frequently happened to her to be ordered out of the room. She wandered away in listless fashion, aware that wherever she went her presence would be unwelcome. Only one spot seemed free to her, and this was because it was deserted by all others. The small room formerly occupied by her husband was always empty, and thither she was drawn by memory and association.

At first she merely sat upon the mat and brooded, looking out of the open door at the forest-clad mountain

with eyes that saw nothing of its beauty in line or colour. On the third day she noticed that the dust had accumulated, and that the dead jasmin blossoms remained just where they had fallen. She went out into the compound and gathered a bunch of twigs with which she swept out the room. In so doing she discovered a glove that had belonged to her husband. She recognised it as his and, picking it up, she kissed it passionately. Once, not so very long ago, it had been a covering to his dear hand. He had worn it in that far-off smoky city of the west, and the strange scent still clung to it.

When she had finished her self-appointed task, she seated herself on the mat to indulge in the pleasure of gloating over her treasure ; and to devise a secure hiding place for it in the fold of her saree. A dozen times it was hidden and brought out again to be fondled and gazed at, to be tenderly nursed like a baby on her arm. She was startled by the sound of a footfall. Hastily thrusting her treasure into her saree she looked up and saw Mayita.

“ Ah, dear sister. How good it is to meet again ! My brother caught sight of you as he walked through the compound, and he sent me to talk to you while he goes to the house to ask for news of your husband.”

“ There is no news,” replied Dorama sadly.

“ Not yet ; but there will be soon,” replied Mayita confidently. The child entered the room and glanced round with approval. “ You have swept it and made it tidy. Does any one come here ? ”

“Not that I know of,” replied Dorama, her hand slipping under the folds of her cloth to close secretly over the glove.

“Then it is ours for the present, ours ! sister ! Think how delightful ! Widows are not allowed to possess anything, so they say ! But listen, I will tell you a secret now that you are my sister. They think I have nothing, nothing in this big world ; but I have lots of treasures. I am rich. I have silver pots and golden cups and china dishes. Sometimes they are filled with oranges and mangoes, pomegranates and mangosteens. I have jewels and silk sarrees——”

“What are you talking about, child !” cried Dorama staring at her in astonishment.

“Hush, speak low, and I will show you some diamonds. They are the dower of a bride in a marriage I am making.”

She untied a corner of her cloth and produced some small white stones that she had picked up in the compound. She chose one and lifted it daintily.

“This magnificent stone of the first water was found at Golcondah a thousand years ago. It was once in the crown of a rich Maharajah. It is worth twenty lacs of rupees ; and if this wedding can be arranged——” her brow puckered suddenly, “but things are not going well. The astrologer has pronounced unfavourably on the horoscopes. The bride’s element is water, and the bridegroom’s partly air and partly fire. Air and water will agree ; but fire and water !—what can it mean unless it be misfortune ?”

“What will you do?” asked Dorama entering into the fanciful world of the other with the kindly indulgence of the older woman towards the younger.

“I have paid a large sum to the astrologer. He is a very clever man—oh, so wise—and he has gone to a big temple in the south to ask for the assistance of the gods. I would do anything rather than disappoint the bridegroom. He is so handsome, so fair, so big and strong! The bride will die of grief if she is not permitted to marry him. Already she is drooping and languishing because of the delay. Beloved sister, you must come to the wedding. You shall be the bridegroom’s mother.”

A generous offer that Dorama accepted with a sad smile. There was a vast gulf between the two widows. One had never tasted the reality. She had only been a bride in name, and she was still able to live in the rosy dreams of maiden fancy. The other had drunk the cup and realised every thing. To her this make-believe was but a mockery, the dust and ashes of a tantalising memory.

“Where is the bridegroom?” asked Dorama.

Mayita untied another knot in her saree and produced a wood-apple which she exhibited proudly.

“See, isn’t he well made?” she said. “Look at his limbs. Feel his smooth skin! How tall! how proud he is and how strong. He will be the father of many sons.”

“Have you the bride as well?”

“She has to live with her people at present. Her

home is in the datura bush. She wears a saree of pure white satin and she hangs her head with beautiful modesty. Sister!" Mayita's eyes surveyed the room with approval. "We will have the wedding here. The astrologer will soon be back from the south, and I am sure that his visit to the temple will have made matters smooth. We shall be able to decorate the place and lay out the feast. I will bring my silver pots and china dishes to-morrow and we will hide them behind your husband's boxes. Oh, how delightful it will be! What a wedding we will have!"

Mayita's eyes sparkled, and the beautiful brown tones of her skin were enriched as the warm blood coursed through her veins. In spite of her shaven head and coarse garment, her youth and comeliness asserted themselves. She babbled on about the wedding, the difficulties that had occurred over the dower as well as the horoscope, the number of guests to be invited, and other details to which Dorama listened, her hand over the hidden glove, her thoughts wandering back into the past when there was another wedding less nebulous than that of Mayita's devising, and she herself was the bride. A call outside checked the flow of description, and Mayita rose quickly to her feet.

"It is my brother. Come to the entrance of the yard while I ask him for news; and listen."

Bopaul in the customary manner of a caste man, stood a little way off waiting for his sister to join him.

“ What news of Ananda ? ” asked the child, stopping in the entrance and calling to him.

“ They have none.”

“ Where is he ? ”

“ They still speak of the well ; but I do not believe that he is dead. Come, little one, it is time we returned.”

Mayita kissed Dorama.

“ My brother is right. Your husband lives ; but for the present you are his widow. To-morrow Coomara’s widow will come again. There will be news by that time from the astrologer, and we shall be able to begin the preparations for the wedding. Sister, those big boxes must be pushed aside ; they will be in the way. Do you think that we could move them ? We will try to-morrow.”

Another call from Bopaul, and Mayita beat a hasty retreat. Dorama was left standing at the entrance. The sun had disappeared in a heavy bank of cloud that later would be streaked with electricity. Rain was wanted ; there had been none for the last few days. Her eye rested on the gourd that had been trampled by the inquisitive crowd. She went to it.

“ Poor plant ! They killed you I am afraid ; but no, you are not dead ! Here are some buds coming and fresh leaves ! ”

She stooped over the vine and plucked away the bruised foliage leaving the stalks almost as bare as her own poor head. Unlovely though the rough stems were they

were full of virility ; and the rain and sun would mend what was marred and reclothe the plant with verdure. She straightened out a few twisted stems and lifted some leaves that had been trodden down but escaped total destruction. It was a curious sight ; the crushed tending the crushed.

Then she entered the room again and thought of the child. Why should she not have the small pleasure of playing her little game on the morrow. She looked at the two portmanteaux and considered how they could be moved out of the way. They were her husband's and must be cared for, as they contained his clothes and books. Of course they were heavy and beyond her power to move.

She gripped the handle of one and putting all her strength into the effort attempted to lift it. To her astonishment it yielded with such ease that she nearly fell over backwards. A cry escaped her lips as she dropped it. It was empty. She tested the weight of the other with the same result. That too was empty, if she might judge by its lightness.

The knowledge came as a shock ; it was a revelation, and threw a fresh and unexpected light on her husband's disappearance. If he had thrown himself down the well it was hardly likely that he would have taken all his clothes and books with him. They would still be here. Where they had gone he must have followed.

But stay ! had some thief stolen the contents ? If so the locks would betray him. She examined them

closely. They were sound and unbroken. No sign of the hand of a thief was to be seen. The boxes were properly locked and their contents had been removed with the owner's consent.

A great joy swept over her, lifting a dull dead weight from her heart. Bopaul had asserted his belief more than once that his friend still lived, and she had heard the assertion with very little faith. This discovery altered the complexion of affairs completely and brought conviction. Her husband was surely alive ! In spite of the dreadful bangle-breaking ceremony ; in spite of the coarse clothing and shaven head she was not a widow. One day he would come back to her and claim her for his own. She would feel his dear arms round her again, his lips upon hers, his words of love would be breathed in her ears once more !

The joy of it all deprived her of muscular strength for the time, and she sank down by those rough battered trunks, leaning her arms upon them and laying her cheek against the stained leather. She could have hugged and kissed them in her gratitude for what they had revealed.

Gradually her mind cleared ; it seemed to have matured during the last few weeks and to have aged with experience. She thought of all she had gone through. First there was the bewilderment caused by his change of faith, which raised a barrier between him and herself, and she realised how intensely disappointed she was. Then came the loss of the child and her sorrow.

Lastly, she had had to endure the degradation of widowhood which, coming as it did on the top of her loss of husband and child, brought her to the verge of hopeless despair. Had it not been for the opportune visit of Mayita she would now be lying in the well where, up to the present, she had believed her husband to be.

The conviction that he was alive grew upon her as she sat there in the darkening room. She drew out the glove and pressed it to her lips. To all intents and purposes she was still a widow, and as such she must remain for the present. As she cherished the glove and hid it, so she must keep her discovery a secret. She must also guard against showing the new hope that had sprung up; the hope that he would return, that sooner or later he would seek her out and bid her come. Could he do it openly? She doubted the wisdom of such a course. She remembered how they had failed in their first attempt to escape. There must be no failure the second time. She must be careful and cautious and trust to no one.

The more she contemplated the step she might be called upon to take at any moment, the more clearly she understood its seriousness. The effect would be far-reaching and irretrievable. To throw in her lot with her husband would mean that she would cut herself adrift from the family for ever. She must be one with him, of his faith, and dead to all her relatives.

Was she prepared to make the sacrifice? Yes, a thousand times, yes! The old spirit that had led her

remote ancestresses to the funeral pile to die in the flames that devoured their dead husbands' bodies, rose strongly within her and bound her to her living husband. For his sake she would endure and bear as he had endured and borne. She would be ready when his summons came ; and she would go gladly, even though he beckoned to her from the fire of adversity, that burned as fiercely as the flames of the old suttee funeral pile ; she would join him and cling to him for ever !

She lifted her head with eyes that shone, not with tears but with a new light. The last vestige of the child died within her ; and the woman who walked thoughtfully back to the zenana, as the shadow of night settled over the landscape, was a woman of determination and strength of purpose. The baptism of sorrow had lifted her on to a higher plane, and had fitted her for better things than a colourless life of inert misery.

CHAPTER XXIV

ALDERBURY had been travelling over his district. As superintending missionary his presence was urgently needed in half a dozen places at once as a rule, not to teach his converts hymns, but to govern their temporal business and to guide their spiritual affairs, to encourage the faint-hearted and to shake the pastoral staff, metaphorically speaking, in the faces of those who showed signs of the old Adam. They received his ministrations with admirable meekness and adored him all the more for his reproof or praise. He loved his people in return; but that fact did not blind him to their weaknesses.

He journeyed in a country cart; not a luxuriously fitted bullock coach such as conveyed Pantulu and his wife to their destination, but a veritable springless vehicle of the country with a hood of matting of the roughest description. At the bottom was laid a mattress. Between the driver, who sat on the same plane with his feet on the pole, and the mattress were piled the boxes and baskets containing the necessaries of life required on the itinerating picnic. They formed a kind of screen between the driver and the occupant of the cart. The back of the hood was curtained with a piece of calico

thick enough to keep out the sun. The most comfortable position for the traveller whether journeying by night or day was to lie down at full length with his head towards the driver.

Alderbury usually travelled by night for various reasons. It was cooler ; it saved time ; it was far more comfortable than sleeping at a village school-house ; where nothing but a mat was provided. In this way he arrived at his destination soon after sunrise ready to begin the day's work of inspection, services, surplice duties, pastoral visits and interviews with the native agents.

It was just nine days since Ananda had disappeared. Wenaston wrote to the missionary after Sooba's visit of inquiry and told him of the intrusion ; he asked him to come on his way back and stay for a couple of nights or more if he could spare the time. He thought something should be done in the way of inquiry after the welfare of the convert, even though he had definitely refused help on a former occasion. The letter followed Alderbury out into the district, and found him just in time to allow of his carrying out Wenaston's suggestion.

From long practice in constant travelling Alderbury had learned to sleep fairly well in the cart, in spite of its jolts and jerks and the strange utterances of the driver when he occasionally woke up and spoke to his cattle. On the morning when he intended to arrive at Chirapore he roused himself before dawn ; and sitting up as well as he could he dressed himself with more care

than usual. He knew who would be waiting for him in the trellised verandah with its mantle of blue ipomea. In fancy he could see the tea-table laid out and the early tea ready, a rack of crisp toast and the boiled eggs.

There had been a shower in the night, and the air was fresh and cool. He jumped out at the back of the cart, without stopping the slowly moving cattle, and strode forward with a superabundance of that vitality which never seemed to fail him. The earth smelt sweet of growing vegetation, and the rain had laid the dust and washed the foliage. Here and there the scent from clusters of newly-opened blossom on the roadside trees permeated the air. On either side of the way spread cultivated fields and patches of garden, for the town was not far off, unconfined by any visible boundary. Pomegranate bushes showed vivid spots of manderin scarlet where the flower promised fruit. All kinds of birds twittered and whistled and chirruped in bush and tree. Noisiest of all were the barbets that never ceased their monotonous call.

Alderbury's eye lingered over every detail with an inborn joyousness that put him in sympathy with all living creatures. The last mail from England had brought him news that might change the current of his life and bring him into new and wider fields. It would mean harder work than ever ; heavier responsibilities ; greater liabilities that would leave him if anything poorer rather than richer ; but he was ready for all and everything if—— Ah, that little if ! there was so much behind it.

Prudence tried to reason and urged objections that were half true and unproven. Was she sufficiently in sympathy with his work, with his aims? Would she be a help? It would be fatal if she drew away and separated her interests from his. The more he doubted the more blindly he loved and desired; the more eager he was to know his fate.

The pale rays of the sun shot up above the horizon on the east, and the white sheets of mist lying on the fields seemed to shiver and shrink as the merciless sun-god sent forth his heralds to give warning of his approach. Long-legged natives wrapped in rough black blankets strode towards their tasks on the land, their brains still slumberous and their bodies still inert with sleep. The cows and buffaloes followed the herdsman to the town, stopping before the doors where the milk was awaited for the early morning coffee. Leisurely and without haste India awoke to its daily round free from the fever and fuss that marks the day in the west.

Alderbury had the road to himself except for a municipal cart that passed now and then with the load gathered from the streets in the night. Behind him rumbled his own conveyance which he was out-walking rapidly. The cattle had done the journey well, and he was earlier than he dared to hope; yet for all that his walk was quick and impetuous as though he were drawn towards his goal in spite of himself.

He arrived at the first house on the outskirts of the

town. It was the one in which Pantulu's family lived. The household was astir and a group of men stood in the verandah preparing to go out on their various errands and duties. From the midst burst Sooba who recognised the missionary although the latter was not acquainted with Pantulu's brother.

"May I have a word with you, sir," asked Sooba.

"With pleasure," replied Alderbury in some surprise. He had no adherents in Chirapore nor in the State, and for the moment he had forgotten Ananda's existence. "What can I do for you?"

"I wish to ask you a few questions about my nephew," said Sooba.

"Yes; but tell me first who is your nephew?"

As he spoke Alderbury looked up at the house and suddenly remembered the visit he had paid.

"Of course, I recollect now. This is where Ananda lives. How is he? I hope he is well."

Sooba glanced at the Englishman suspiciously, trying to hide his distrust under a forced smile.

"My nephew sought your assistance some days ago, sir."

"I think you are mistaken. I offered help but he refused it. Since that time I have neither seen nor heard of him, except the fact mentioned by Dr. Wenaston in a letter, that he had left his home and that you were under the impression that he had gone to the college. It was extremely kind of the Principal to allow you to go

through his private rooms. I am not sure that I should have been so obliging."

Alderbury's voice had unconsciously assumed a tone of reproof, and Sooba writhed inwardly under it.

"Dr. Wenaston could not refuse, since a refusal would have been a tacit acknowledgment that he was harbouring a Christian and breaking his covenant with the Maharajah."

"Not at all," replied Alderbury sharply. He did not like the manner of the man. "You took a great liberty. It was sufficient for all purposes that he assured you Ananda was not there. What made you think that your nephew had gone to him for help?"

"The gardener gave me a hint that some one had arrived the night before," said Sooba sullenly.

"The gardener! Ah, the man owes his mistress a grudge. The housekeeper caught him stealing her roses. So that was how he took his revenge, and you were foolish enough to be made the instrument."

"The gardener was right in saying that a visitor had arrived in the night. The woman's son, a sick soldier, came in by the mail. I saw him lying in her room drunk."

"Where do you suppose your nephew has gone?" asked Alderbury not choosing to discuss Mrs. Hulver with the man.

"That is what I expect you to tell me, since he has been so foolish as to break his caste and join a religion that is acceptable to the pariahs and panchamas only."

"Sorry I can't oblige you ; good morning," said Alderbury, checking his rising anger with difficulty.

Sooba was left standing in the road. His eyes followed the athletic form of the Englishman with no good will. He believed Alderbury when he declared his ignorance of Ananda's movements, because the drowning theory commended itself for various reasons, and because he had already ascertained that his nephew was not at the mission station. Ananda ought to be at the bottom of the well ; every circumstance pointed to it. At the same time seeing the missionary on the road he thought it was a good opportunity of speaking to him. At the back of his subtle mind was the hope that, in a chance conversation of the kind, he might be able to offer him some slight about which he could brag afterwards to his friends. It was not necessary that Alderbury should notice and resent any discourtesy ; it was sufficient that it should be shown ; and it would go towards compensating the ill-conditioned man for the treatment he had received from Mrs. Hulver.

Alderbury knowing the Oriental suspected something of the kind, and his suspicion was confirmed as soon as Christianity was mentioned. He put an end to the interview abruptly leaving Sooba with a sense of failure that did not tend to smooth matters for him.

The bullocks, recognising that they were not far off their halting place, put on a spurt and caught up the pedestrian, who dived into the cart from the back and sat cross-legged on his mattress until, with much jangling

of bells, sighing and snorting of cattle, and creaking of cart-wheels, he arrived under the portico of the college house. The welcome he so confidently anticipated struck no note of disappointment.

Three hours later breakfast was over and Wenaston had departed to take up his duties in the college. Eola was interviewing Mrs. Hulver and settling the house-keeping programme for the day. She was inclined to be absent-minded, her thoughts wandering to such an extent that she was guilty of ordering two joints instead of one. Mrs. Hulver regarded this lapse of memory with suspicion and recalled her young mistress to the subject somewhat sharply.

"Mr. Alderbury has a dainty appetite more suitable to a bishop than a missionary. He doesn't want two joints," she remarked.

"Dear me ! did I order two ?" asked Eola in some confusion.

"Yes, miss ; you asked for a boiled hump of beef and a roast saddle of mutton. The saddle you shall have to-morrow. The hump is for to-night as it has been quite long enough in pickle. That with the fish and entrées will more than satisfy Mr. Alderbury. I don't hold with a daintiness above your station. As William—that was my second—used to say : 'A private can't expect captain's grub, and a captain mustn't look for general's fare, else there'll be proud stomachs.'"

"Have you ever seen a bishop ?" asked Eola,

feeling vaguely that she must throw off suspicion and show an interest in Mrs. Hulver's conversation.

"Yes, miss, of course I have! Wasn't I confirmed by one? He was tall and solemn and had a thin grey beard. He reminded me somehow—it wasn't his legs—of a picture in my father's big family bible of the goat that was sent out by the Children of Israel into the wilderness."

"The scape-goat that had to bear the sins of the people," said Eola, her eyes wandering through the house to the front verandah where she could see her guest in the distance absorbed in his letters.

"Yes, miss. The bishop was just like the picture. Hadn't he got to bear the sins of his people? and a very serious business it was too. When he confirmed me he gave me clean sheets and started me afresh; he took my sins on him. I shouldn't like to be a bishop considering all he has to bear and wear. The gaiters and the tights would be enough to put one off the job, even though the apron does lend a little decency to the style. As William—that was my third—used to say: 'All are not saints who go to church, or bishops and padres would have an easy time of it.'"

During this speech Eola's attention again wandered. Mr. Alderbury was still busy with his letters. As soon as he had finished reading his correspondence she intended joining him.

"Then that's all for this morning," she said, as Mrs.

Hulver came to an end of her dissertation on church dignitaries.

“ You haven’t ordered the pudding, miss.”

She made the announcement in the same manner in which she might have said, “ You haven’t said your prayers, miss.”

“ I’m so sorry. What has cook brought ? Green mangoes ? Yes ; they will do nicely stewed ; and a custard pudding.”

“ Custard pudding ! ” repeated Mrs. Hulver with disdain. “ It’s the pudding Mr. Alderbury gets every other day of his life ! and him with the tastes of a bishop ! ”

“ Then I leave it to you, Mrs. Hulver. Now let me finish with the accounts.”

Mrs. Hulver was more vigilant than ever this morning over Ramachetty’s charges. Miss Wenaston was clearly not fit for the matutinal crossing of swords with the sharp-witted butler, and it was the housekeeper’s duty to intervene and protect.

“ As William—that was my third—used to say : ‘ It’s fatal to go into action unless you’ve got your wits about you and your guns are in good order,’ ” remarked Mrs. Hulver when she had checked the butler for the third time.

Eola did not see the point of her remark and Mrs. Hulver made no attempt to explain. The bazaar account book was closed with relief, and the butler and cook dismissed.

“How is young William getting on?” asked Eola, preparatory to dismissing her housekeeper as well.

“He is nearly well, though I can’t get the colour of his eye down altogether. What his colonel will say to him to-morrow I don’t know. He will have to be told the truth if he asks about the black eye.”

“He may not make any inquiries if he finds young William”—by common consent the adjective had been given to distinguish the son from the three Williams of the former generation—“doing his work properly.”

“There are colonels and colonels, miss. Some can put on the blinkers when they think fit. Others shy and jib at everything that comes within sight. Fortunately young William’s complexion helps a bit, and the black eye doesn’t show as it would if he were as fair as his father.”

“Then you think of sending him back to-morrow.”

“His leave will be up by that time.”

“I must tell my brother. He said he would speak to him about the canteen and fighting.”

“It would do him good, miss; but to tell the truth I’ve said pretty nearly all there is to be said and I haven’t sounded cease firing yet.”

“I hope the scolding has not been overdone,” said Eola, a wave of pity for young William passing through her as she thought of the lectures the anxious mother had already given to her erring son.

“No fear, miss. It’s my chance and I haven’t spared him. I shan’t see young William for some time

to come. I've let him have it broadside, in the front and in the rear. As William—that was my third, and he was a gunner—used to say, 'Don't spare powder and shot if you want to produce a lasting impression on the enemy.' There's one thing I want to ask you, miss. Is Mr. Alderbury going on from here by his carts or by train ? ”

“ By motor ; the carts are to leave early to-morrow morning or to-night. The motor will be wanted after lunch to-morrow. The chauffeur must spend the night at the mission bungalow and return the next day.”

“ Then nothing will be needed for Mr. Alderbury's tiffin basket,” remarked Mrs. Hulver as though dismissing the subject since it did not concern her any further.

Eola caught sight of her guest pacing to and fro in the verandah and she turned away to join him. Mrs. Hulver followed her.

“ I should be glad if you could spare me to-morrow for half a day. I should like to go to the station with young William and see him off. He will leave by an early train so as to get in in time to report himself before six.”

“ By all means take as much time as you like.”

“ Would you like to come and speak a word to young William, miss ? ”

“ No, please not ; I really have nothing to say.”

“ It would do him good if you just said as before ; ' Let it be—— ’ ”

Eola interrupted her hastily.

“ Oh, no, Mrs. Hulver ; I am sure that more than enough has been said. Young William will be glad to get away.”

“ Then the Doctor will come and talk to him.”

“ Is it necessary ? Don’t you think he might be let off any further scolding ? ”

“ Well, miss ; he has yet to face the sergeant and perhaps the colonel. So it isn’t done with yet ; and he won’t be out of the firing line till he has reported himself and had his dressing-down.”

“ Then I am sure that he must be spared anything further from us.”

Mrs. Hulver’s reply was to the effect that it should be as Miss Wenaston pleased. Ten minutes later the housekeeper might have been seen, in a huge mushroom topee and with a large white umbrella, crossing the compound in the direction of the camping-ground chosen by Alderbury’s driver and servant. In the afternoon business took her to the town to make some purchases for young William, she explained to Ramachetty.

CHAPTER XXV

“How have you been getting on lately?” asked Eola as she sank into a cane lounge in the verandah.

Alderbury stopped in his perambulation, gathered up a number of letters lying on the table where the tea was usually spread and made them into a neat packet. None of them required an immediate answer; they could all wait until he reached home. He intended to make the most of his one day’s holiday. He had the whole morning before him; Wenaston was engaged till lunch, and Eola presumably had nothing to do but entertain her guest. It was a pleasant prospect, and he was conscious of a sense of luxury that did not often enter his life. He revelled in the unwonted leisure of the hour and took his time to reply. He seated himself in a chair by her side, and half turned so that he might have a full view of her face against the green creeper-covered trellis that shut in the end of the verandah.

“I have a fair share of trouble balanced by some satisfaction.”

“Converts been doing anything very naughty lately?”

He laughed in kindly fashion. In his large

sympathetic soul he held his people dear, from the blackest little ball of a baby brought to him for baptism to the white-haired old woman; who persisted in calling him father though she was twice his age.

“It is rather like having a very large nursery or school of children,” he said. “Some of them are so good and others——”

“Are up to tricks,” Eola concluded for him.

“Only between us confidentially.”

They both laughed in a way that showed a mutual understanding and not a little sympathy on the part of the woman, not so much for his work as for himself personally.

“Do tell me their latest,” she said softly.

“It is not for publication. On your honour you won’t give me and my people away to a missionary magazine?”

“I promise.”

“Let me whisper my troubles in your ear, then. I have had a bother over a bell tower. Four months ago I sent five hundred rupees that I had collected for the purpose to the native pastor in charge of the little church at Ramapet; and I solemnly enjoined on him by letter the necessity of beginning the building of the tower at once. I have been to see it.”

“You have found that they have put up a glorified steeple, I suppose, costing twice as much as the sum you sent.”

“Wrong, dear lady, entirely wrong! The bell tower

surrounds the property on which the church stands in the form of a wall ; and in the corner of the compound is a new well."

"What has become of the bell ? "

"It is there safe enough ; oh, yes, and it rings all right. The church council composed of the most important of the native parishioners met me and pointed out how wise they had been, as wise as serpents to use their own expression. The church compound is already under cultivation and the water will not only produce a crop, I should say rather, two crops in the year, but will also be a source of income as it is purchased by the villagers at so much a bucket. They are all delighted with themselves for their cleverness. The bell-tower, they say, will come all in good time. Meanwhile they have erected a little shelter of mats and bamboos in a peepul tree and have hung the bell there."

"What did you say ? "

"I had to disapprove and point out that it was a breach of faith and a misappropriation of funds."

"Was the wall needed ? "

"Badly ! Nothing could be done with the land to make it productive until we had an effective barrier to keep out the buffaloes and goats."

"Then really it is a most excellent move."

"Not at all ! Don't you see that there are principles involved ? "

"They should have asked your consent, you mean, to the temporary deflection of the money ? "

"I should never have given it! They knew it and took good care not to let me into the secret. What am I to do, pray? Where is my bell-tower to come from? It will take two or three years before they can refund the money. Some of it was given by an enthusiastic lover of bells, who was charmed with the idea of assisting to build the tower. Bells, he declared, were missionaries themselves and exercised a Christianising influence. What am I to say to him? He won't see any Christianising influence in the well and the wall."

He sat up in his long armed chair and gazed at Eola with comic concern. It made her laugh.

"My sympathies are all with the builders of the wall. I know how I felt towards the buffaloes and goats before the wall round this compound was completed. After all the bell does very well for the present in the peepul tree."

"Your morals are hopelessly inferior—I won't say bad—and you would make a very weak mission agent," he said, shaking his head over her shortcomings.

"Should I? Then I mustn't marry a missionary. Think how awful it would be if while he was away preaching to the heathen, I remained at home encouraging his converts to misappropriate the mission funds."

"He would have to take you with him; it wouldn't be safe to leave you behind."

They both laughed; then he became serious again.

"But I say, really, joking apart; you know they have put me into no end of a difficulty by their cleverness,

and I am at my wits' end to think how I am to rectify it."

"I know!" cried Eola, with a sudden inspiration. "Haven't you any other funds in hand from which you could borrow and get the tower built at once?"

He jumped to his feet as was his way when excited and strode up and down the verandah.

"You are every bit as bad as my people! That's the very thing they have done and which I am deprecating; and you suggest that I should follow their example. I can see that I have a duty to perform. I must take you in hand and convert you."

He stopped in front of her and let his eyes rest upon her abundant hair.

"Try," she said, looking up at him with shining eyes in which amusement mingled with something else. "Do try; I should like to see what your method would be."

"Would you?" he replied. "You might not like it."

"Is it the same as you apply to the heathen?"

"Not exactly."

Her eyes lowered before his, and she was seized with a sudden anxiety to direct the conversation into a fresh channel.

"Sit down, Mr. Alderbury, and tell me more about your converts," she said hastily.

"Very well, I will defer the conversion till a more suitable time and talk—of marriage."

Again she was startled. She glanced at him as he

dropped into the seat he had vacated so abruptly. His self-possession was in no way disturbed.

“Marriage !” she repeated as the colour mounted.

He revelled in her sweet confusion ; but had mercy.

“Yes ; the marriage of one of my converts. A young man in the agricultural settlement wants to marry the daughter of a distant relative. The girl is still a heathen. Of course I had to say no, and counsel patience. We don’t allow mixed marriages. I left him rather sad, as he knows the girl and is attached to her. Being pariahs they have been allowed to see something of each other.”

“Oh, poor fellow ! Is she fond of him ?”

“Yes ; I think so ; as far as a modest Hindu maid may permit herself to be.”

“Then they ought to be married ; and I think it is very horrid of you to forbid the wedding.”

“The girl must become a Christian first ; then the wedding bells shall be rung and the feast prepared ; but not till then.”

“But supposing she won’t become a Christian, what then ?”

“The marriage can’t take place.”

“Poor lovers ! What a shame ! You are hard on them ! Why shouldn’t the girl marry first and be converted afterwards ?”

“That would never do. I always begin with conversion ;” he looked at her and paused with half a

smile ; then he added : “ Marriage must follow conversion.”

“ Oh, must it ! ” she replied with a challenge in her voice. “ You take a good deal for granted.”

“ A common fault with men of my profession, I fear,” he replied with a decision that had its attraction.

“ Are you never disappointed ? ”

There was a slight pause. His reply was spoken in a different tone.

“ In the matter of bell towers, yes.”

Alderbury sat down again, and Eola with half averted face looked out into the sunlit compound where the brilliant colours of the geraniums and bignonia creeper contrasted strongly with the pure snow white of the eucharis lilies ; where butterflies that rivalled the flowers in tint fluttered like wind-driven petals across her vision, and the sweet scent of the *La France* roses came in on the warm morning air.

“ Now tell me about Ananda,” said Alderbury recalling her thoughts.

“ I know very little about him. My information has come from Mrs. Hulver who picks up gossip in the bazaar. You had better hear the story from her first hand. I will send for her.”

A message was taken by the butler who met the house-keeper as she returned from her walk in the compound. She went into her room to remove the mushroom hat and dispose of her umbrella ; and she took the opportunity of telling young William that she had made

arrangements for him to leave at daybreak the following morning. She entered the front verandah, keen inquiry in her eye as to the reason of her call.

“Were you wishing to have a few words with my son, sir? If so, I should be pleased if you could come in half an hour. He is just going to have his bath. A dressing-down from your point of view will be very good for him. As William—that was my third—used to say: ‘Don’t confine yourself to big guns in dealing with an enemy. Bullets speak quite as plainly as cannon balls though they are neither so big nor so noisy.’”

“I don’t think your son wants any lecturing from me. No doubt he is fully repentant after all that has happened. Dr. Wenaston told me the story of his fight, and I am sure young William will keep away from the canteen in future,” said Alderbury kindly.

“He will try, sir; I know that; but canteens draw very strongly at times. There’s the smell to contend with as well as the open door. As William—that was my third—used to say: ‘An open door will tempt a saint.’”

“I want you to tell me all you know and have heard about Ananda. Sit down, Mrs. Hulver,” he said, giving her a chair. “I don’t see why you should stand. Let us have a comfortable chat whilst we are about it.”

He noted the cloud of anxiety that seemed to overshadow her usually placid face and put it down to

trouble over her son. Her words confirmed his suspicion.

“To tell you the truth, sir, I have had no time to consider Mr. Ananda. I have been so worried by young William’s conduct.”

“You mustn’t think too much about it. You can’t expect everybody to be a saint.”

“I don’t, sir, and least of all young William from the way he has begun——”

“What did you hear of Ananda in the bazaar?” asked Alderbury interrupting her.

“As far as I can recollect the family ill-treated him, knocked him about with a stick and he ran away. They didn’t like his turning Christian. As William—that was my third—used to say: ‘What women haven’t got to answer for, you may safely put down to religion.’”

“It was supposed that he was in hiding somewhere on the college premises. It seems the gardener heard of the arrival of your son and thought it was Ananda.”

“The gardener?” said Mrs. Hulver puckering her brow. “So we may thank him for that budmash’s visit. I shall have to remember that.”

She thought of the roses and felt that the man had got even with her after all; but she kept her thoughts to herself.

“In coming here he was taking a great liberty, I admit; but it was as well that he should satisfy himself that Ananda was not on the premises.”

“I should never have allowed him to go through my

rooms if the master hadn't given him permission. As it was I had to submit ; but I didn't like it with young William lying there and the fever still on him. As William—that was my first—used to say : ‘ Orders is orders when spoken by a superior.’ ”

“ Have you heard any spot mentioned as likely to be a hiding-place ? ”

“ There have been all sort of rumours, sir. They said at first that he had gone to you ; but a messenger was sent to your house to inquire ; and as nothing had been seen of him there they changed their minds. I don't wonder at his running away if they really did illtreat him. As William—that was my second—used to say : ‘ Distance is the best remedy against the spite of evil men.’ You never saw such an evil-looking beast as that uncle was who came poking his nose into everything here. If young William had been himself and not so ashamed of his black eye he would have upped and at him and soon had him out. I think the man himself was afraid that something of the sort might happen. As William—that was my first—used to say when his relations came to stay without an invitation : ‘ Uninvited guests sit on thorns.’ ”

“ When they discovered that Ananda was not at my house what was the next suspicion of the family ? ”

“ That he had drowned himself in the well.”

“ What gave rise to that notion ? ”

“ They found his cap in the well.”

“ But not his body ? ”

“ No, sir ; all the same his people believe that he is drowned and they have widowed his wife I am told. I can’t answer for the truth of what I hear in the bazaar. As William—that was my first—used to say : ‘ An Indian bazaar is a nest in which many rotten eggs are laid.’ ”

“ You were very kind to Mr. Ananda, Mrs. Hulver,” remarked Eola.

“ My kindness was of the fair weather sort. I gave him food and plenty of good advice, before master put it in orders that no help of any sort was to be found in this house. Mr. Ananda ate heartily and listened politely ; but he didn’t take my advice soon enough. As William—that was my second—used to say : ‘ The man who stops in the valley will never get over the hill.’ I keep telling young William these sort of things. I hope some of them, specially about drink and fighting, will stay by him. As William, his father used to say : ‘ The way to promotion doesn’t lie through the canteen door.’ ”

“ If you should by chance find means of communicating with Ananda—— ”

“ And him down the well, sir ! Why, it’s more than a week—— ”

“ Do you believe that he drowned himself, Mrs. Hulver ? ” asked Alderbury, his eyes fixed upon her round smooth face that held very little expression but general good-nature towards the whole world.

“ Well, sir ! There’s his widow ! A widow is usually

the sure sign of a man's death ; though I have heard of the widow's weeds being put on too soon. That was the case of a woman in our regiment whose husband was seconded for service in Africa. He was reported killed ; and just as she was getting over her trouble and was cheering up a bit, owing to one of the unmarried sergeants paying her a little attention, he came back. She had to go into colours again before the black was half wore out, an expense all for nothing that she could ill afford, poor thing ! But as William—that was my second—used to say : ‘ There's no plumbing the depths of a man's folly when he's a fool.’ He should have written and told her that he wasn't dead ; but that meant sending her money. Perhaps Mr. Ananda may come back one day like Sergeant Thompson.”

“ His uncle stopped me on my way here to ask if I knew anything of him. I could give him no information, and I take it that you can't help any more than I can.”

“ That's so right enough, and if you see the budmash again you may tell him that his precious nephew's whereabouts has nothing to do with me.”

“ Possibly ; but as Mr. Ananda belongs to our faith, I certainly think that his welfare has a great deal to do with me,” said Alderbury with a touch of severity.

“ Of course, sir ; it's only right ; it's your profession to look after the converts. My business is house-keeping ; and if the Christmas turkey was missing from the larder I should be in even more of a taking than you are over Mr. Ananda. As William—that was my

first—used to say : ‘Mind your own business and leave others to mind theirs.’ You are leaving us to-morrow, sir, I understand. I’ve seen your men ; they want to start off to-night with the cart if you have no objection. The portmanteau you are using will go on the motor. This will give them time to get to the mission-station before you arrive. I told your servant that I thought he could be spared.”

“By all means let them go if they wish. We shall all be glad to get home as we have been on a longer round than usual this time.”

“Yes, sir ; as William—that was my third—used to say, when he got safely back after leaning a little too far in the canteen direction : ‘There’s no place like home, even though it’s only a pigsty, Maria, me dear,’ that was his way of speaking, he was such a gentleman in his manners.”

“My house is not a pigsty, Mrs. Hulver,” protested Alderbury, while Eola’s eyes twinkled.

“I’m not saying that it is, though there’s no woman in it. As William—that was my third—used to say : ‘A house without a woman is only a house ; it can never be called a home, however clever the man may be.’”

“It is a fault that may be easily remedied,” responded Alderbury.

Mrs. Hulver glanced at him suspiciously, and then let her eyes rest upon Eola.

“If you were a bishop you might say so, sir ; but

you're not a bishop, and begging your pardon for saying so; you're not likely to be if I may judge by your legs. Gaiters would be impossible for you, even though you let your apron down a good four inches. As William—that was my second and as soldierly-looking man as ever stepped—used to say: 'It isn't every figure that will fit every profession.' I may tell you, sir, that by reason of my fullness of figure I was never chosen when I was young for the leading fairy in the regimental pantomime at Christmas. I was given to fullness early; but excepting in the matter at the pantomime I never felt any inconvenience from being stout. My husbands all admired stout women, and they said one after the other that fat in a woman may make her short in the breath, but it keeps her smiling. Now you're given the other way and you've got just the figure for a missionary."

"And so missionary I am to remain, eh, Mrs. Hulver?"

"There's great virtue in knowing your place and your station, sir," responded Mrs. Hulver, feeling that she was having the opportunity of her life to give the ineligible a bit of her mind. "One day you will meet a lady, suitable for a missionary's wife; and though she may dress plain, she will soon turn your house into a home with curtains and carpets and decent house-linen. She must be a good housekeeper." Mrs. Hulver again let her eyes rest on Eola as though she were taking the measure of her shortcomings in that respect. "And

she must be sharp as a needle with the butler over the house accounts."

"If I am ever a bishop, Mrs. Hulver, I suppose I need not be so rigid over the housekeeping qualities of my wife. A bishop usually has a housekeeper."

"Lor, sir, how you talk! As if that would ever come to pass! But as William—that was my third—used to say: 'Many people talk like generals but have to live like privates.' There's no harm in your talking of being a bishop as long as you're content to live like a missionary. I must be going; I have a lot to do."

She bustled away, and with her went the smile that had rested on Alderbury's face. Eola watching him noted the change.

"What is it?" she asked. "You are troubled. Are you thinking of Ananda?"

"Yes; and I am blaming myself," he replied quickly. "There is so much I might have done to prevent this catastrophe if I had come when your brother called me. Instead of coming I wrote. It was not enough."

"I don't believe in a catastrophe. I don't believe that he is dead; I am sure Mrs. Hulver doesn't believe it or she would not be so indifferent. What do you fear?"

"That they have killed him between them."

"They would not dare! That would be murder and they would fear the penalty."

"Unfortunately there is no penalty in the case of an outcaste, a convert to Christianity. There might

be some sort of a trial, but no judge in the State of Chirapore would do more than impose a slight punishment."

"Come into the fernery and look at my palms and lilies," she said, rising to get her hat.

She succeeded in dispersing the anxiety that had settled down upon him as he considered Ananda's case; and once more the convert was forgotten. Her hands were buried in the fronds of a maidenhair when he said suddenly:

"Don't do that; it isn't safe; there might be a snake hidden in the fern."

She laughed, but did not move her hands. Then he took them in his and drew her away from the pot where he feared danger might lurk.

"Eola, will you come and make my house a home for me? I want you; I can't live without you," he concluded with a strong man's passion.

She looked up at him suddenly serious.

"Think how far I fall short of the ideal! I—— Oh, really you are the most masterful man I ever met. Mr. Alderbury——!" And then her head dropped and she surrendered.

"Are you converted to my way of thinking," he said at last. "Or, shall I continue my arguments?"

"I am quite converted; quite!" she replied, and her eyes shone.

"Then I may tell you a secret. Whatever my figure may be in Mrs. Hulver's opinion, the gaiters and apron are looming in the distance. I heard from England by

the last mail that I have been nominated for a colonial bishopric ; ” and he named the diocese.

“ What fun it will be to see the dear old woman’s face when she hears of it ! ”

He drew her down to a seat among the ferns.

“ Never mind the old woman. I want the whole of your attention. There is so much to talk about and we have only till to-morrow,” he said, already grudging the moments.

“ Anyway my conversion is complete.”

“ Oh, is it ? I am not so sure of that. At any rate I will see that nothing is left undone to make it so ! ”

CHAPTER XXVI

LUNCH was over ; the car stood under the portico breathing gently like a tamed and willing monster held in a metal leash. Alderbury, ready to start, was inclined to yield to a new temptation and linger in his leave-taking. Wenaston politely stayed to see his guest off under the mistaken impression that it was a necessary courtesy. At the same time his ear was open for the sound of the school bell.

"I am sorry that you have not succeeded in the object of your visit," he remarked, his conscience still troubling him in the matter of the 'vert.

Alderbury and Eola exchanged glances with an amused twinkle of the eye. If there had been failure on one point, on another the missionary had achieved a marked success.

"We must leave it alone for the present," he said with a seriousness that was not assumed. "When you are confronted with caste, you stand before invincible plates of steel. To beat against them violently does more harm than good. We must wait for the doors to open of themselves. There can be no forcing them open."

"I hope the poor fellow is safe."

“And I hope and pray that he is standing firm in the new faith,” responded Alderbury quickly.

“I used to think that Ananda was weak in character.”

“Possibly he was; but after all that he has gone through his character must have strengthened marvelously. I have known similar cases, although not among the higher castes. The fervent religious instinct of the Hindu sustains him in circumstances where a less religious temperament would give way.”

“You believe that he is under his father’s roof?”

“From what I gathered yesterday afternoon in my inquiry of the town’s people, I feel sure that he has not been allowed to leave the place.”

“Is he safe?”

The question was asked with an anxiety the Principal could not hide.

“Ah! that I cannot undertake to say. All the same I have a strong hope that beyond petty persecution he is, comparatively speaking, safe. My hope originates with Bopaul. His manner gave me confidence. I met him in the town; he spoke openly of his friend’s disappearance, and seemed in no way concerned about it. He laughed at the theory of suicide. If he had any suspicion of a tragedy he would not show such indifference. I know for a fact that he is very much attached to Ananda.”

“They were together in England and they both felt Coomara’s death. I was with them at the time, if you remember. The accident was a great shock to us all,

and my nerves are not what they used to be. The person least affected was Bopaul apparently," said Wenaston.

"We don't know how it affected him; he has a peculiar nature, and hides his real sentiments under a careless flippancy which his actions frequently belie."

"He certainly is a strange mixture of incorruptible orthodoxy and modern tolerance," assented Wenaston.

Alderbury commented tersely and incisively on the new Hinduism of the Presidency towns, and compared it with the old-fashioned bigotry to be found up-country, where there was less European influence than in the great educational centres. Native states with their native officials were even still further behind than British India, opposing religious reform with strong prejudiced conservatism.

"I suppose you welcome this new tolerance as a step in the right direction."

"Not at all," exclaimed Alderbury, his fighting instinct roused. "It is more difficult to attack than the old intolerance; it is elusive, shifty, the outcome of the Brahmanical facility of adaptation which is the invariable resource of the Hindu philosopher in every religious innovation. I would rather come to blows with the fanatical old Brahman than with one of these modern men whose policy is to agree with reservation."

"So you turn to the untouchables."

"Who form a sixth of India's population. They offer us a wide field for our energies," replied Alderbury.

“You are wise to give the caste people the go-by.”

The missionary was up in arms at once at the implication that he turned his back on any one.

“Excuse me ! We don’t give them the go-by. We are ready watching for the moment when the thin edge of the wedge may be inserted without bringing disaster upon them and ourselves. By the by, an odd thing happened yesterday. Bopaul to my astonishment asked me if I would befriend his sister, the widow of the man who was killed in the railway accident.”

“Coomara ! I had forgotten that he married Bopaul’s sister.”

“It was no more than a bethrothal. Bopaul explained that his sister was not happy at home ; and that it would be a relief to the whole family, in his opinion, if she were removed. Then he laughed as though the attitude of his relations amused him. He proposed that she should be placed in our mission school.”

“Does the family consent ? ” asked Wenaston in some surprise ; for no one understood the prejudices of the high caste families of Chirapore better than himself.

“Apparently his parents are too indifferent to the widow’s fate to care whether she throws herself down the well or disappears off the scenes in any other way. I told him to speak to his people about it ; and if they consented I would willingly take her.”

The school bell rang and Wenaston rose from his chair.

"I must be off. Good-bye, Alderbury," exclaimed Wenaston. "Come again as soon as you can ; a warm welcome will be ready for you."

The hand-clasp expressed even more than the tongue, as the two friends parted with the knowledge that before long a closer and more intimate tie would be forged to bind them together.

Five minutes later Alderbury stood on the steps of the verandah ready to enter the car. He turned to Eola once more.

"I haven't said good-bye to Mrs. Hulver. Have you told her our news ? "

"Not yet ; she has been too much occupied with her son to think of anything else. She was to go off early this morning with young William ; and she asked me not to expect her back till this evening. I might have let her into the secret last night ; but I heard after dinner that she had gone to bed."

"I don't know whether to feel relieved or disappointed. I am sure that she will forbid the banns," he replied in comical concern that did not deceive Eola.

"She will quote the wisdom of the three departed Williams in support of her action," she added, and her laugh had a new ring of happiness in it.

The car slid noiselessly down the drive and turned into the great southern road. Alderbury leaned back on its cushions luxuriously, his thoughts busy with the woman he had just left. He had been lifted along on

the wings of destiny. He had come to Chirapore to hold out a helping hand to a fellow creature in distress, and had found his own happiness as a reward.

Having taken the step he was of too strong a character to entertain any doubt as to its wisdom. However short she might fall of the ideal missionary's wife, she was his desire and he was hers. This new knowledge and certainty lifted him into a sphere of joy he had never before touched.

After a few minutes indulgence in purely selfish dreams, Eola with all she meant for him was put resolutely aside. He took out the bundle of letters that awaited him at the college house and proceeded to read them afresh, making notes of the replies on the envelopes.

The car moved along the smooth road at a moderate pace. Now and then the eyes of the occupant ranged over the undulating landscape, resting with appreciation on the patches of green forest covering the crests of the hills, and the stretches of rice fields interspersed with plantations of areca-nut palms in the valleys.

Few travellers were on the road. A string of country carts crept slowly towards the town, bearing the produce of the rich smiling land to market. The car shot by with a deep hum that set the wild-eyed bullocks snorting and backing under their yokes; and transformed the drivers into kicking fiends. In vain they sought to inspire the terrified cattle with courage and confidence by a liberal application of the toe. It was not until the car disappeared in the distance, and its weird hum was

lost to the ear that the bullocks were recalled to order and a sense of duty, and the drivers were able to drop back into idle clucking at their beasts.

Six miles of quiet travelling came to an abrupt end. The native chauffeur pulled up at a signal from a traveller on the road, walking in the same direction as the car was moving. Alderbury, who was absorbed in the composition of a letter to the head office of his society, looked up, and to his amazement recognised Bopaul.

"I am going to ask you a great favour, sir," said the latter after the exchange of greetings. "I have my sister here. Will you be so good as to give her a seat in the car; and to take her to your mission-station?"

Alderbury glanced beyond the speaker and caught sight of the shrinking figure of the widow. Her sarree was drawn over her bald head to hide the mark of shame and disgrace. Her eyes were cast down, and the hand that grasped the coarse cloth to keep it in position trembled.

"Of course you take the responsibility upon yourself, Bopaul," said Alderbury looking at the girl with pity born of an intimate knowledge of what widowhood meant for one so young.

"Certainly, sir," responded Bopaul quickly.

"She will be at perfect liberty to return if the family desire it. It does our work no good to have even the semblance of abduction."

"You need have no fear of trouble, sir. My people

will make no objection whatever. If her husband were alive it would be quite another matter ; but with a widow ! ” he smiled with gentle cynicism, “ whoever heard of any regret being felt at the absence or even the death of a Hindu widow ? ”

“ Very well ; I will take your word for it that all is well, and that I am only carrying out the general wish of the family. Let her get in the car at once, as I must be going on my way, or I shall be benighted.”

“ She will sit by the chauffeur.”

“ There is plenty of room inside,” said Alderbury, pushing cushions and rug into some order.

Bopaul went to the side of the road where his sister stood and said a few words in a low tone. She did not reply, but made a movement of the head showing that she understood his directions. Then he took her by the hand and led her to the car.

“ Get in, little sister. You will be quite safe with the missionary ; and if you are not happy with him, ask him to write and tell me so. I will come myself and fetch you back, but I know you will not want to come back ; you will find your happiness there ; not here.”

“ It is understood by your family that she will probably become a Christian if she remains with us,” said Alderbury who was a little puzzled by Bopaul’s manner.

“ She is at liberty to do as she pleases. Of one thing I can assure you ; I can answer for her willingness to work at anything that will help to earn her keep.”

“ And her name ? ”

“I call her Mayita ; but she will probably prefer to be called by some other name when she enters the mission,” replied Bopaul with another smile.

“She has no luggage of any kind, no bundle of clothes ? ”

“Widows own nothing. They are deprived of every possession in the world. Even their hair is taken from them,” her brother answered.

During this conversation Mayita sat silent with her head bent and the saree veiling her face. Suddenly the cloth was pushed backwards and she leaned towards Bopaul both hands extended.

“Brother, may the gods reward you for your goodness to the poor widow ! ”

“Good-bye little sister. Take heart and be brave. Now go, sir, and believe me that all will be well.”

The car glided forward and left Bopaul standing there. He watched it until nothing was visible but the cloud of soft dust that hung like smoke in the warm air of the afternoon.

Then he turned round and set off at a steady pace homewards. Again the characteristic smile appeared and he murmured to himself :

“In the name of friendship ; not in the name of religion ! ”

CHAPTER XXVII

ALDERBURY addressed a few words to his companion in the language of the country and received monosyllabic replies which gave him no encouragement to persevere in his efforts at making conversation or to extract information. He concluded that she was a shy and frightened member of a zenana where very little liberty was allowed. It would all come right in time; she would lose the shy self-consciousness with education.

From his companion his thoughts went to her brother. He distrusted Bopaul's cynicism, mild and harmless though it might be; but he could not help admiring the force of character in the man who had struck whilst the iron was hot. If Bopaul had not handed her over personally and assured him that all was well, Alderbury would never have ventured to take the girl away. The parents had probably been urged to give a consent, and before they could withdraw it their son had taken action to carry out the intention. It was evident that he revolted against the Hindu system of widowhood, and with his modern enlightenment desired reform. This was his method of protest and it was to be commended. It was also in its way a mark of the philanthropy that

is entering the Hinduism of the present day, one of the attributes of Christianity which Brahmanism is ready to adopt into its system and claim as its own.

More than two hours passed during which Mayita, shrouded in her saree, nestled in the corner of the big motor car. Alderbury returned to the perusal of his letters and forgot her very existence. So still and silent was she that she might have been one of the leather cushions instead of a human waif. They passed the boundary of the native State and sped through British territory. In another half hour they entered the little town that had been Christianised. Alderbury put away his letters and kept his eyes on the road, that he might not miss the smiles and nods of the villagers as they welcomed him back.

The mission house was a large rambling bungalow with thatched roof and wide verandahs. In the same compound stood the school and orphanage. At a little distance was the church shining with marble whiteness in the afternoon sun.

As the car drew up under a porch made of rough square stone pillars and palm-leaf roof, Alderbury thought of the handsome portico of the college house, a very different building. He jumped out of the car with his habitual impetuosity forgetting his companion. Mrs. Hulver's words were in his mind. A house without a woman was only a house. It was quite true although his careful servant had not forgotten to prepare a late afternoon tea. He noted the table set in the verandah

with the earthen tea-pot and the thick cups that bore the mark of many camping expeditions through his district. Very different, was the table from the dainty arrangement in another verandah, where the figure of the tea-maker was set in a background of ipomea and bignonia.

“Bring tea quickly, boy,” he said as he passed on towards his sitting-room in search of the letters that should have come by the morning post.

The servant glanced after him and then held up his hand to arrest the figure that followed.

“Wait, lady, until the master calls,” he said respectfully ; and Mayita stood listening and trembling in the verandah.

As Alderbury entered his sitting-room a man rose from a chair and advanced to meet him. He was dressed in European clothes although he was a Hindu. Over his eye was a recently healed wound.

“Ananda !” cried Alderbury, astonished beyond measure.

“The same, sir,” was the reply.

“How did you get here ? We made so sure of your being still under your father’s roof that I can scarcely believe my eyes.”

“By the help of friends. It is a long story——”

His words were checked by the sound of a cry. The widow refusing to be detained any longer by the servant, rushed forward past Alderbury, never stopping till she had fallen at Ananda’s feet. In a moment he was

on his knees by her side forgetful of the missionary and all else.

“My wife ! my pearl ! my beloved ! How did you manage to escape ? how did you get here ? But what have they done to you my beautiful lotus ? They have cut off your hair ! and this cloth ! what does it mean ? ”

The words poured from his lips with a string of eager questions which Dorama could only answer with sobs.

“Who do you say this woman is ? ” demanded Alderbury in some bewilderment.

“She is Dorama, my wife, sir ! And see what they have done to her, poor child ! Not content with nearly beating the life out of me they have widowed her ! the brutes ! This is my uncle’s doing. I will be even with him. He shall answer for it with his life ! I will kill him as he would have killed me ; and I will widow his—— ”

“Gently, Ananda ! The Hindu in you dies hard. You do well to be angry, but don’t mistake anger for revenge.”

The hand that was laid upon his shoulder held in check the tempestuous wrath.

“Forgive me, sir. Wrong done against myself I can forgive—but this ! ” He looked down at his wife.

“They believed that you had drowned yourself, so successfully have you been hidden,” said Alderbury. “And they considered themselves justified in their action.”

Ananda lifted his drooping, but happy, wife to her

fect and kept his arm about her. His anger melted and he forgot his wrath in the consciousness of her presence.

"How did she come here," he asked in calmer tones.

"I brought her," replied Alderbury.

"You, sir," repeated Ananda in surprise.

"Yes; your friend Bopaul must have interested himself in your affairs; for it was he who met me on the road this afternoon and begged me to take his widowed sister to the mission house and keep her there. He deceived me and took me in completely."

A smile dispersed the frown of anger that had rested on Ananda's face.

"Ah, the clever Bopaul! It was well planned. He is a friend worth having!" he said warmly.

"I'm afraid he is—a—a perverter of the truth!" blurted out the missionary.

"A splendid liar!" agreed Ananda enthusiastically. "I know of no one better. It is a great accomplishment in a Hindu to lie usefully and successfully."

"But it is altogether wrong in a Christian."

"I know it is!" replied the 'vert with a sigh of contrition. "I am afraid I have not been altogether straightforward myself of late."

"Tell me all about yourself and how you managed to escape," said Alderbury kindly, knowing that it would be best for him to talk it out instead of brooding over his wrongs, and perhaps being incited by his wife to further ill-will in considering the persecution she had endured for his sake. "When did you arrive?"

They seated themselves, Ananda retaining his hold on his wife as though he still feared lest she should be snatched away from him again. She sank upon the floor at his feet, resting an arm upon his knee with a comfortable sense of security which went towards compensating her for some of the unhappiness that had lately fallen to her lot. Alderbury called for the tea to be brought into his sitting-room.

“ I arrived this morning.”

“ By train ? ”

“ No, sir ; I came by bullock cart. Let me tell you the story from the beginning. After your call at my father’s house I was allowed to see my wife in the presence of the guru, who paid us a visit to inquire why the restitution ceremonies had not been performed. He tried to come between myself and my wife ; but I was determined not to permit anything of the kind. Our interview was not pleasant. After it was over, and I had returned to my room I resolved to put an end to the uncomfortable state of affairs and leave my father’s house.”

“ You were right in your intention.”

“ I made a mistake in not accepting your offer of help, sir. It was an error of judgment. My intention was to fight my own battle without assistance.”

“ I understand ; but how did you ultimately get away ? ”

“ I was to all intents and purposes a prisoner in the house, and escape was no easy matter. I found a friend

in the pariah I despised so much. By his advice I made the contents of my boxes into bundles and he undertook to take them to Biddapet, a station about ten miles out of Chirapore in this direction. I was coming here, of course. The luggage was gone and I was spending what I hoped was my last night in that miserable little room when I was awakened by a touch on my hand. It was my wife. She came to me in great distress to tell me that our son was dead."

There was a pause which Alderbury did not break. Ananda went on with his story.

"I persuaded her to throw in her lot with mine. It was a long walk to Biddapet, but she thought she could manage it if I gave her time. We started off before it was light and reached the wall of the compound. Unfortunately we disturbed a pariah dog. It barked and I threw a stone at it. It shrieked and the noise must have been heard in the house; for we were followed by our uncle and four other members of the family. They caught us up and we were powerless in their hands. There was nothing to be done but to go back, which we did; and when we reached the house my wife and I were again separated. That night I was severely beaten; and during the frightful ordeal my uncle never ceased to call upon me to recant. How I lived through it I don't know. God in his goodness gave me strength to bear the pain and to hold fast to Christ. I did not take my punishment with the meekness of the Great Master. I fought for my liberty. They were too many and too

strong for me, however. I was held down, and it seemed at the time as if they must break every bone in my body."

Up to that point Ananda had used the English tongue. He laid his hand on his wife's and asked in native speech whether she knew that he had been beaten.

"Aiyoh ! husband ! I suffered and died with thee, beloved lord !"

Her eyes filled with tears and she kissed the hand passionately. He continued in the vernacular which Alderbury understood.

"After they left me I fainted. I don't know how long I lay there, but the next thing I remember was water being dashed into my face. I tried to protect my eyes, but the movement gave me great pain, and I cried out ; I was so terribly bruised. Someone spoke to me in a whisper and told me to be quiet. Once more my friend in need was the sweeper ; the man you saw, Mr. Alderbury, when you paid me a visit."

"You were too sick to think of caste any longer, I imagine."

"Indeed, I was ! I let him do with me as he would ; and I was grateful, more grateful than I can express. He rubbed my wounds with some soothing ointment and staunched the blood ; for I was bleeding a good deal. Then he gave me a draught with opium in it. It deadened the pain and made me drowsy and indifferent to all that was happening to me."

“ Good man ! worthy of the name of Christian though he is only a heathen,” commented Alderbury with warm approval.

Dorama did not take the same view.

“ Husband, did you really accept the services of the sweeper ? ” she asked, her wondering eyes lifted to his with concern for his welfare.

“ Yes, my lotus flower, I did ; and I owe him my life. I should have died of exhaustion and starvation if I had been left untended all that night and the following day.”

“ What happened next ? ” asked Alderbury as Ananda showed a disposition to end his tale there.

“ Before I continue my story I must ask you to keep my secret. I have given a promise that it is to be told to no one but yourself ; and I pray you to respect our confidence.”

“ ‘ Our confidence ’ ? ”

“ Mine and Mrs. Hulver’s.”

There was a pause ; and then, as enlightenment came, Alderbury said in a low voice :

“ So then, you were young William ? ”

“ The sweeper carried me wrapped in a sheet ; for I could neither walk nor stand. It was between two and three o’clock in the morning when I was hoisted on to his back in a half unconscious state, my senses too stupefied to feel much pain, and I was taken to the college house. Mrs. Hulver was roused from her sleep by the sweeper woman—who works there, and is a relative of the man—and I was handed over to the housekeeper.

I have since called her mother, so good and kind has she been to me. Under her care I recovered."

"And through her good offices you have come to me. How did you get here? By train?"

"No, sir; I came in your own cart and brought my luggage with me," replied Ananda. He continued his story. "When the sweeper found that I did not turn up as I promised at the little station, he carried the bundles back to his own house and came hot-foot to learn the reason of my failure to keep the appointment. There he found me in that sorry plight."

"I am still puzzled," said Alderbury after a little thought. "Mrs. Hulver's son was seen by Miss Wenaston lying on the cot in her sitting-room; and he was wearing uniform, the uniform of the regiment."

"When I regained consciousness in her room, I found myself dressed in the uniform that belonged to her son's father. She had kept it, and though it was very old and a loose fit, it served as an excellent disguise."

"She is a wonderful woman!"

"The kindest! the best!"

Ananda stopped with sudden emotion, his heart too full for words.

"I suppose this means that all communication between yourself and your family comes to an end," remarked Alderbury.

"I think not, sir," replied Ananda in a decisive voice. "Why should I be banished from my home

like a criminal because I have changed my religion ? I shall not allow my wife to go back. There is no reason why she should run any risk of insult ; but I shall go back later on, when the irritation against me has died down, and see my father and mother."

"Don't put yourself in any unnecessary danger. Past experience should make you careful," said Alderbury.

"It has been dearly bought and is not likely to be forgotten," replied Ananda, with a touch of bitterness.

"And remember also that in Chirapore you, as an outcaste and Christian, have no civil rights."

"I am not likely to forget what is the only stain upon its government as a model native State. I should not think of returning to live there ; but I mean to go some time or other to see my mother."

The old obstinacy was still to the fore. Behind it stood no longer the weakness and vacillation of youth, but the noble courage of a man who had been tried in the fire of affliction and not found wanting.

"And now I want to know how your wife managed to get away and meet me on the road."

"Tell your story, beloved. I, too, want to hear how you escaped and who befriended you," said Ananda.

"The friend was the same Englishwoman who helped you," answered Dorama timidly ; but gaining courage she continued : "She arranged it all with Bopaul. There was no difficulty ; for since I have been

thus—" she touched her coarse cloth—" no one has cared how I spent my time nor where I wandered. Mayita came every day to see me and we passed hours in your little room, my lord, where I found this!" She pulled out his glove and showed it to him. "At sunset yesterday Mayita brought me a message from Bopaul to say that my husband was alive and safe on British ground, out of reach of our uncle's spite. Oh, how I rejoiced at the good news! but I was obliged to hide my feelings. Mayita told me that if I wished to see him again, I was to keep my secret and follow every direction sent by her, without asking any questions. This morning as soon as I could leave the house I went to the little room and there I found Mayita waiting for me. She said that I was to go at once to Bopaul whom I should find in the compound. He was there. Without a word he took my hand as he takes his sister's and together we walked away. Any one seeing us from the house would have thought that he was leading his sister home, for my saree was drawn over my head; and Mayita has grown nearly as tall as I am."

"Did no one notice you, my pearl?"

"Who would let his eye rest on the unlucky widow any longer than he could help? Those who might have seen turned their heads away."

"Your wife may thank your enemies for what they did," remarked Alderbury. "Without her widow's dress she could never have escaped."

"Bopaul brought some food with him, for we had

a long way to go. We walked steadily for an hour. Then he made me sit down and rest. Afterwards we walked again, and my heart beat fast when I heard the call of the big fire carriage ; but I grew quiet again when I sat by Mr. Alderbury's side, and we flew along the road like the wind. I felt that no one, not even our uncle, could catch me and take me back. Ah, husband, how I suffered when they did this to me ! ”

She passed her hand over her bald head. Ananda stooped and kissed the shaven crown.

“ Beloved, it will soon grow again and be more beautiful than ever.”

Alderbury slipped away unnoticed. He was full of sympathy for the two poor souls who had passed through so much pain whilst for himself all had been as he desired.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MAYITA had a long day in the little room by herself, but the time passed quickly. Bopaul provided her with a packet of cakes and sweets to serve instead of the midday meal which she would be obliged to miss. He explained to his mother that they were going some distance and would not be home till sunset. No surprise, therefore, was caused by Mayita's absence.

She had brought the bridegroom and bride with her, and she spent a very busy day marrying the happy wood-apple to the satin-white datura blossom plucked fresh from the tree on the way there. The oleander bush and gourd supplied the flowers required for the guests ; and as for the feast, no pretence was needed. The cakes were real ; the sweets were of the best ; and as she ate them Mayita's enjoyment was abundant enough for herself and the numerous guests represented by a goodly array of sticks and stones.

She lived in a little kingdom of her own ; and for the time she was dead to that cold outer world which treated her so unkindly. In the beautiful domain of her imagination her widowhood passed away and she

was the mother of the bride or bridegroom according to her fancy. Various sounds in the distance met her ear, but she paid no heed to them. The jangle of bullock bells only stirred her sufficiently to bring to her remembrance the fact that the bridegroom should have a gilded bullock coach in his procession. It sent her on a careful search through the yard for something that would represent the coach.

The sound of the bullock bells caused a greater sensation in the house than in Ananda's little room. They broke suddenly upon the household an hour before the midday meal, as the cattle plunged up the carriage-drive and were stopped with much sighing and snorting before the front verandah.

The door of the coach was opened by a firm unhesitating hand, and out stepped no less a person than Gunga herself. She bore no sign of widowhood in her appearance. Her upright figure was swathed in a new silk saree that, like Mrs. Hulver's Sunday dress, "stood by itself." She wore a purple satin jacket and a crimson silk petticoat. The rich gold embroidered border of the saree held the wealth of colour together, and saved the whole from tawdriness.

With the dignity of a raneé of the olden days she moved up the steps of the family mansion and entered her house. A cry of surprise greeted her as the various members came hurriedly forward to make their salaams. Sooba's wife when she had recovered from her astonishment was not behindhand with her welcome. Her

husband was out, she informed her sister-in-law, but he would return to dinner.

Gunga's eyes were everywhere ; she led the way to the kitchen, where she looked into the seething pots and bubbling curries. She found nothing wrong and expressed general approval of her sister-in-law's management. Having satisfied herself she left the kitchen. Sooba's wife followed closely at her heels deputing another woman to take up her duties. Mats and cushions were brought, and the two sisters seated themselves in the courtyard to have a chat before the food was served.

"How does our excellent elder brother spend his time ?" asked Sooba's wife, burning with curiosity to know if the invalid were much worse.

"He has taken over charge of the farm."

"It must be hard work for one in such poor health."

"Not at all !" snapped Gunga, who did not like these personal inquiries ; they were a breach of etiquette, and likely to bring bad luck upon the subject. "The health of all the family at the farm is excellent. Strongest of all is the big master ; he is like a man of thirty instead of fifty, and he is busy all day long with the rest."

"This is good news, sister. My husband will be rejoiced to learn it. We feared that you were having much anxiety."

The halting speech betrayed her real feeling, and Gunga was not deceived. With keen enjoyment of the discomfiture of the other she gave more details of her husband's restoration to health.

“I felt sure that you and our little brother would be pleased to hear of the improvement,” she concluded.

“How is the silk farm doing?” asked the other, hoping to defer the cross examination that she knew was pending. She felt unequal to the task of explaining satisfactorily all that had occurred of late. Sooba himself must account for his various unwarranted assumptions in his stewardship. Gunga was quite ready to talk of the silk business with its new developments. She retailed at length the history of its culture on the farm—all they had done and all they hoped to do. She described their plans for further improvements by which their profits might have increased and the industry expanded.

“The manager leaves us in a week’s time, and my husband will continue to superintend until he returns six months hence.”

The spirits of the listener rose at this information ; it was highly satisfactory as far as Sooba was concerned. Considering that there was no longer any fear apparently of Pantulu’s death, the next best thing for his younger brother’s interests would be a prolonged absence with the creation of new interests outside Chirapore city. In the midst of their conversation Sooba himself appeared. He had seen the bullocks tethered in the compound, but had not heard who the visitor was. He thought it might be a merchant come from a distance to buy silk or cotton or rice ; and with the intention of creating an impression of his own

importance he swaggered in, speaking with a loud strident voice that could be heard all over the house.

“Wife!” he called. “Where are the men of the family! Why isn’t the food ready? What are your lazy women about in the kitchen? We shall have to send some of them out into the fields if they can’t do their work in the house. Don’t they know that the master is hungry and would eat?”

His wife scrambled to her feet and went to meet him. Before she could say a word he recommenced his scolding.

“A new bamboo is wanted for this lazy family; and if the mistress will not use it, the master will take it in his own hand. I warn these idlers that the stick will not fall lightly or sparingly.”

A figure appeared suddenly behind his shrinking wife, tall, stern and commanding, with no fear in her eye.

“Neither the master nor the mistress of this house requires a new bamboo unless it be for the back of a presumptuous younger brother,” she cried in a tone that startled Sooba more than a little. He fell back a pace or two as he was confronted by the angry Gunga.

“Sister! I did not know you were here! When did you arrive?” Then as he received no reply he continued turning to his trembling wife. “Woman, have you seen to the comfort of the big mistress? Have you provided the curry she likes with plenty of green chutney?”

She was not to be taken in by this solicitation for her personal welfare, and she replied sharply:

“I have everything I want. As the house is mine I have only to give my orders. Sister, go to the kitchen and see that the rice is properly strained before it is served out.”

Sooba's wife gladly made her escape, and left her husband to bear the brunt of the storm that she guessed was not far off.

“You have taken too much upon you, brother. We did not make you master of the house, but steward in our absence. It seems that you have misunderstood your position.”

“I have done my best,” replied Sooba sullenly. “From all we have heard it is probably that the time is not far distant when I shall be the real master, since the son you bore your husband has become an outcaste.”

The taunt only added fuel to the fire that was already burning within the breast of the mother.

“The mention of my son reminds me to ask where he is. News was brought to the silk farm which I could scarcely believe. It was said that you had driven him away, and that he has left his home without saying where he has gone.”

“My fool of a wife has been telling you tales,” he replied, scowling in a manner that promised ill for her.

“I have learned nothing from your wife. I asked no questions but kept them for you. The news was brought to me by the men who returned from carrying the last bales of silk to the go-downs in Chirapore. They heard it in the bazaar; and I have come to inquire into

its truth and to learn first and foremost where my son is."

She let her eyes rest upon him with a keen inquiry there was no evading. Much as he disliked the close catechising he was obliged to reply.

"We have every reason to believe that he has thrown himself down the well."

"Why should he be tempted to do such a thing?"

"He was angry and offended because we gave him the punishment ordered by the swami. It was light and less than he deserved——"

"I have heard another story. Where is his wife?"

"She is here in the house."

"I don't see her in the kitchen, where, as my daughter-in-law, she should be superintending the women."

"Since she has become a widow she leads a retired life as is only fitting," explained Sooba, with increasing uneasiness.

"A widow! then the body of my son has been found!"

Sooba shifted from one foot to the other as he answered.

"His body is still in the well."

"Has any one seen it?"

"His cap was seen and recovered from the place where it hung about a foot above the surface of the water."

"And on the strength of that you have performed the widow rites. It appears to me that you have acted with unwarrantable harshness towards my son and his

wife. There would have been time for the ceremonies when my son's body was found."

"He is dead! I assure you he is dead!" protested Sooba. "It is the firm conviction of other members of the family whom I have consulted that he is dead."

"And if it be true, is it for the wife of the younger brother to strike the bangles off the arm of the heir's widow? But I tell you she is no widow! My boy is alive; he had too much spirit to stay where he was ill-treated; and too much courage to drown himself. You were wrong to beat him as you did."

"It was with your consent."

"That a small punishment should be given to satisfy the swami lest he should curse us. You have done more; you have gone beyond your orders. Where are the jewels?"

"I have them in safe keeping, sister," he replied, beginning to tremble for the consequences. She had it in her power to turn him and his wife out of the house.

"After we have eaten you shall hand them over to me together with the moneys that have been paid in by the silk and cotton merchants."

She dismissed him as the household was waiting for dinner. The men—who were served first—could not begin to eat until the representative of the family had offered the daily oblation to the deity and said grace.

When the meal was over Gunga summoned Sooba

giving him no time for the after-dinner nap claimed by the more important members of the family.

“Let him bring the jewels,” she said to his wife. “Come yourself and listen to what I have to say. It concerns you both.”

Sooba had an unhappy half-hour with his sister-in-law. He found himself called upon to account not only for the jewels and every rupee paid in but also for every anna paid out, the amount of rice taken from the granaries, the curry stuffs that had been used, the produce of the dairy and garden.

The wardrobes and clothes' chests were emptied, the contents displayed and missing sarees accounted for. The contents of the strong box containing the family jewels was examined, even to the numbering of the loose gems and pearls that formed part of the wealth belonging to Pantulu.

It was hard to be made to disgorge when he had looked upon the coveted treasure as his already ; but Sooba and his wife had no alternative. Dorama's jewels were handed over down to the smallest silver toe-ring. Gunga examined them critically, separating several of the choicest and most valuable from the rest. They were not put back in the strong box, but were placed in another and more portable jewel case. This she locked, and slipped the key on her own bunch which was tied to her betel-bag.

“Are you taking the jewels away with you ? ” asked Sooba.

"They are required at the silk farm," she replied shortly.

"For yourself or for the manager's wife?"

"Neither; they are to be worn at a wedding I am arranging. They will adorn the bride."

"Is she a relative that you honour her thus?"

"She will be when the ceremonies are completed. I am making a second marriage for my husband, since our son is lost to us, and I am not likely to give him another. The girl is young and strong and will bear us many sons."

Sooba's jaw dropped in astonished consternation and speech failed him. His wife was more ready with her tongue.

"It is an excellent plan, sister; one that I had thought of adopting myself since the gods have not blessed me with children. Is your husband strong and well enough to play his part?"

"You should see him! He is like a young man! you would think the years had gone backwards instead of forwards, he is so full of strength and energy." Gunga handled the remaining jewels tenderly as she put them back in the strong box. "Although the girl's people are not poor, her jewels are nothing compared with these that belonged to my son's wife. This gold ornament"—she picked up the richly embossed disc that Sooba's wife had envied and already appropriated—"will sit well on her hair. It used to look so well on Dorama's head."

“When is the wedding to be?” asked Sooba, his heart sinking within him as he contemplated the future.

“In three days’ time. After the wedding I shall return here to live, and my little sister will remain on the silk farm under the care of the manager’s wife. I shall go over frequently to see them, and when the manager comes back six months hence, my husband and his wife will join us here. Now I wish to see Dorama, and to know why she did not come to the kitchen for her food when the rest of the family had dinner.”

Some of the women were sent in search, but the widow could nowhere be found. The basin of curry and rice put aside for her was untouched. One of them recalled the fact that she went frequently to the room formerly occupied by her husband. Gunga rose to her feet.

“I will go there myself; you need not follow; I wish to see her alone.”

Her word was law and they dared not disobey. She passed through the garden and out into the compound taking the path by which the men had gone on that dreadful night with their evil intent. To her surprise she heard a voice murmuring in the room. Unseen by the busy match-maker she watched the child at her play. Then she entered and the girl started violently as though she had been discovered in some act of flagrant wickedness, as, indeed, from a Hindu point of view was the case; for was she not enjoying a few

hours of perfect happiness, and upsetting the Hindu notion that widows have no right to be happy.

"Most excellent lady, I was brought here by my brother and told to stop till he returns," she said, fearing blame and perhaps punishment for trespassing where widows were unwelcome.

"You are doing no harm, child. Your brother is Bopaul, is he not?"

"No one ever had such a good brother! To-day he is being good to the poor unhappy Dorama; but I am forbidden to say anything about it; so if your excellency would know what he is doing you must wait till he returns."

"How soon will that be?"

"Perhaps in another hour. They had to walk until they found the carriage that was to take Dorama away."

"Where was she going?"

"Ah, that I must not tell; but think how pleased her husband will be when he sees her!"

"Is he waiting on the road?"

"I think not, most honourable lady, because he is safe somewhere with the missionary; but where I may not say."

"Do you know the place?"

"No, excellent mother, not yet. My brother will tell me this evening when he comes back."

"He is coming here?"

"To take me home. I hope he will be in before it is dark. I should not like to stay in this ugly little

room at night. This was the place where they beat Ananda. The market women say that he was nearly killed ; and that his new God must have come Himself and carried him away ; he was hurt so that he could not stand. Ah, bah, that Sooba Iyer is a bad man, the market women say ! I love listening to the market news. When I am strong and big I shall ask them to let me go as a coolie to carry one of the baskets. Then I shall hear of all the deaths and weddings and births and beatings and accidents and scoldings and widowings.”

“Go on with your play, child. I will see your brother when he comes for you,” said Gunga.

Mayita had another hour to wait before she heard his call. As she came out of the yard she caught sight of the tall stern woman going across the compound to meet him. She stopped at the entrance till the interview was over, the timidity of the widow and her fear of giving offence holding her back.

“I want to ask you if you know anything of my son,” said Gunga going straight to the point.

“He is staying with Mr. Alderbury, the English missionary.”

“And his wife ? ”

“She has joined him with my assistance. After all that has happened I felt that I must lend her the help of a friend, whether I gave offence to your honourable husband or not.”

“It will not be regarded as an offence. Why did they leave home in this secret manner ? ”

“ Can you ask, most excellent lady ? The treatment they both received from their uncle was sufficient to drive them to the other end of the earth. I wonder they lived through it.”

Gunga's lips closed tightly, and her eye burned with the fire of the tiger who sees her cubs ill-treated. There was a pause and she asked :

“ Is he well ? ”

“ He has nearly recovered from his injuries.”

“ I want to see him ! ”

The unpremeditated words burst from her lips with passionate longing. It was the cry of the mother whose maternal love could not be stifled nor killed by anger. Her instinct thrust down every barrier, and she cried aloud for her offspring. The lonely woman was giving up her marital rights to another for the sake of her husband's religious prejudices that she respected and believed in thoroughly. She devoutly hoped that a son would be born to him who might bring comfort and reassurance concerning the future. Her act of renunciation made a heavy demand upon her. She had already seen how the man's eyes had turned with desire towards the younger woman in whom lay so much promise ; and although she was still mistress of his house, their unity was ruptured for ever. The Hindu woman understands polygamy and, as in Gunga's case, sees the urgent necessity for it ; but she is not indifferent. She tolerates it as unavoidable ; at the bottom of her heart she hates and loathes it. This

introduction of a second mate is at the bottom of all sorts of evil in the zenana, of jealousy and hatred on the part of the superseded ; of arrogance and tyranny on the part of the interloper.

Gunga was battling with jealousy even though she herself had arranged what was to take place ; and she turned to her son with a longing that would take no denial, renegade and apostate though he was to his family and religion.

“ Tell me where he is so that I may go to him ! After all, he is still my son, my only child, my dearly loved boy ! ” she pleaded.

Bopaul recognised the maternal cry and he answered sympathetically.

“ A letter addressed to the mission station will always find him. Let me remind you, honourable lady, that it is not Ananda who has created this breach between his parents and himself. It was always his hope that his father would continue to treat him as a son ; that some way might be found by which the ties of blood might be maintained without complete banishment from home. You have so acted that any compromise was impossible. He has done well in removing himself out of reach of injury and insult ; and in forsaking a country that gives him no protection as a citizen.”

Gunga's proud head drooped.

“ Perhaps we were too hard on the boy. If we had had more time for thought it might have been different,” she said, in a broken voice.

“ Shall I give him a message when I write ? ” asked Bopaul whose curious, modern philanthropy made him ready and almost anxious to heal the breach.

“ Ah, do, my son ! ” replied Gunga, with sudden hope. “ Tell him that I will come soon and talk to him at the mission house. I have so much to say. There is work for him at Bombay. Tell him that though he is lost to his father, to his religion, to the State—though he is an outcaste and an exile, his mother remains his mother still. Nothing, nothing that gods or men may devise, can ever deprive a woman of the rights of motherhood when once a child is born to her ! ”

CHAPTER XXIX

MRS. HULVER was busy cleaning and folding an old uniform. The door of her room was closed and locked whilst she was thus occupied. With many sighs she passed the brush over the well-worn cloth and smoothed out the creases.

“An iron would do it good ; but it must go for the present as it is. It won’t do for the uniform to be seen just now. To think what the master would say if he knew that the poor young man was in the house all the time ! He would give me a month’s notice as sure as my name is Maria Hulver ! But there, as William used to say ”—the William in her mind was the wearer of the uniform in the old days—“ ‘ What the eye doesn’t see, the heart doesn’t grieve for.’ God forgive me for loading up young William’s shoulders with that canteen racket, and him as innocent as a new-born babe ! But as William—that was my third—used to say : ‘ If the dhoby donkey were shown half the load that was meant for its back, it would die of terror.’ Young William shall never know if I can help it that he was the hero of a canteen fight.”

She wrapped the uniform in an old linen towel,

tucking in bits of camphor on every side, and laid the relic of by-gone days in the bottom drawer of her wardrobe. A knock at the door startled her. She closed the drawer hastily, put away the brush and went to see who called her.

“Miss Eola! Come in, miss. Were you wanting to speak to me?”

It was the day after Alderbury's departure. The car had come back bringing a letter for Eola, the first she had received since his love had been declared. She read it in the privacy of her room, lingering over the closely-written sheets as Mrs. Hulver had lingered over the folding and putting away of the uniform that had belonged to the father of her boy.

The housekeeper was still in ignorance of what had passed between Eola and the guest. Her mind had been too full of anxiety over Ananda's welfare to admit of any curiosity concerning the behaviour of other people. She knew that she ran a risk in extending the helping hand to the persecuted 'vert; but she had carried it through without faltering.

Without any explanations she had ordered his luggage to be placed in the missionary's cart and told the driver that he was to start that evening, a command that was gladly obeyed.

While the dinner was still proceeding Mrs. Hulver and her scarlet-coated companion left the house presumably for a walk. A jutka was picked up outside, and directed to take the same road as that followed by

the cart. The pony went much faster than the slowly moving cattle, and soon overtook and passed them.

Half an hour later the missionary's servant was roused, and to his intense astonishment confronted by the Principal's housekeeper. By her side stood a native gentleman dressed in European clothes and wearing a neat turban. As Alderbury's servant had never seen Ananda he did not recognise Mrs. Hulver's companion.

"You will carry on this friend of mine to the mission station," she said, "and you will tell the master when you see him that I gave you the order."

The servants all understood the varied modulations of her voice. In this case it was comprehended, though not expressed, that a breach of her confidence would be resented, and bring the individual into her black books. At the same time there was a chink of silver that purchased silence and secured obedience. Ananda took Alderbury's place on the mattress. The servant seated himself near the driver and the cart started on its homeward journey. By daylight it should have crossed the border and be safe in British territory ; and by nine o'clock it should be home. As no warning had been given to Ananda's family it was not likely that he would be pursued or discovered ; and Mrs. Hulver saw the car swallowed up in the darkness of the night with a sigh of relief.

She walked back to the place where she had directed the jutka to wait for her, carrying the uniform, which had been exchanged under cover of the darkness for the

tweed suit, hidden under her cloak. She was back at the college house before eleven.

The following day, on which she was supposed to be seeing young William off by the morning mail was spent at the house of a Eurasian friend in the town. Eola, suspecting nothing and occupied with her own affairs, asked no questions; and it was not till the morning after Alderbury's departure that she and Mrs. Hulver met.

The housekeeper accompanied by Ramachetty and the cook presented herself for the usual ritual of ordering dinner. During the housekeeping business Mrs. Hulver confined herself rigidly to the subject of the menu. She dared not trust herself to speak of anything else lest her tongue should slip and betray her. The secret must be kept at all costs from Dr. Wenaston and from the people in the town. The sweeper might be trusted. He had been a faithful friend all along, and one day his fidelity would be rewarded by Ananda. Of that she was sure, although the man did not look for any recompense. All that he had done had been the result of his love for the young master he had known and served in time past. The change of faith on the part of Ananda did not affect him. He knew nothing of the intricate ceremonialism of the caste Hindus. His religion was simple animism, the propitiation of the power of evil. If he had had any opinion to offer, it would have been that his master had come under the influence of an evil spirit, and would do well to make an offering of blood.

Mrs. Hulver considered that the rest of the servants might also be trusted. The real identity of young William had never been known to them, and he remained Mrs. Hulver's sick son to the end.

Eola intended making her confession after the servants were dismissed; but Mrs. Hulver departed quickly in their wake and defeated her purpose. She determined not to put it off and went to the house-keeper's room to inform her of the engagement without further delay.

With the packing away of the uniform Mrs. Hulver drew a breath of relief. Anxiety was at an end, a load off her mind.

"Take a chair, miss. The room is still untidy from having young William here; but the sweeper and I will soon get it straight when she comes back from her dinner."

"It looks quite neat," said Eola inconsequently; she was wondering how she was to open the subject uppermost in her mind. "Your son got away all safe yesterday morning, I suppose."

"Yes, miss!" Mrs. Hulver would not trust herself to more than the simple affirmative.

"I am afraid you are rather tired after all the nursing you have had."

"I took a good rest yesterday. After young William left I went to see my first husband's cousin, Mrs. de Silva. She was in a fine way about her girl who has refused to marry the man chosen for her. The silly

child—she's only sixteen—has set her heart on a young Englishman who is out of employment. I did my best to cheer her up and to argue with the girl."

"You are always doing something for others. You must think of yourself now and rest."

"I'm happier when I am doing for somebody else, miss. As William—that was my second—used to say: 'You'll find happiness for yourself when you're hunting it for others.'"

"That's quite true."

There was a pause. Mrs. Hulver received a sudden shock. Her eyes had fallen on her husband's helmet which was lying on the camp cot. She had forgotten to put it away. Eola saw it and observed:

"Your son has forgotten his helmet, surely."

"That isn't my son's, miss! It belonged to his father. I got it out to show him the difference the authorities have made in the pattern. They are always changing, and it must cost the government something first and last. I have kept that old helmet as a memento of my boy's father."

"I suppose out of all the three you liked him best."

"Well, miss, he was my choice. My first was my mother's choice, and my third chose me. You see, William, my second, left me with something else besides his helmet and that was young William."

Eola's attention was wandering and Mrs. Hulver was pleased to see that the helmet had not excited her curiosity.

"I want to tell you something; it is about Mr. Ananda," said Eola.

Mrs. Hulver started, but was not to be caught off her guard.

"To tell you the truth, miss; I am getting rather tired of Mr. Ananda's name. I dare say he has got safely away from Chirapore by this time if he isn't down the well. As William—that was my third—said when the barrack sweeper led him home from the canteen: 'Misfortune will find you queer friends in queer places.' If Mr. Ananda is still alive he has probably found some friend, queer or otherwise, to help him."

"You are right. When Mr. Alderbury reached home Mr. Ananda met him at the door."

"Lor, miss! you take my breath away!" exclaimed Mrs. Hulver expressing discreet astonishment.

"Like your husband in his difficulty, it was the sweeper who proved his friend. He took him to some hiding place, and threw his cap down the well to deceive his people and put them off the scent. When the excitement of his mysterious disappearance was over, the man contrived to smuggle him out of the State of Chirakul into British territory, where he is quite safe. At the mission house another surprise awaited Mr. Ananda. His wife managed to escape and find her way to Mr. Alderbury's station. I thought you would be pleased to hear the news," concluded Eola with reproach in her voice.

“So I am, miss,” was the warm response. “I am very glad to know that he is safe. He wasn’t safe from the spite of wicked men as long as he remained in Chirapore. His only hiding place was the sweeper’s house where no man of caste would venture. As William—that was my first—used to say : ‘A rat that has but one hole is soon caught.’ Mr. Ananda will need no hiding place as long as he stays with Mr. Alderbury.”

“I have some more news for you, Mrs. Hulver. Mr. Alderbury was so much impressed by what you said about a house being no home without a woman in it, that he has asked me to make a home for him of his house—and I have consented.”

“There, now, if I haven’t gone and made a mess of it after all !” exclaimed Mrs. Hulver, more than a little disturbed. “As William—that was my second—used to say : ‘An ounce of sense is worth a pound of wit ; better slip with the foot than the tongue.’ To think that my foolish tongue which must need sharpen itself at his expense should have put it into his head to ask you to do that ! I should never be reconciled to your marrying a missionary, miss ; not if I lived to be a hundred !”

“Don’t worry about it ; it’s all right ; I am not going to marry a missionary,” said Eola.

“Not marry him ! miss ! whatever do you mean ?” cried Mrs. Hulver in horror. “You can’t keep house for a man except as his housekeeper or his wife—that is to say, if you have right-minded principles. As William

—that was my second—used to say : ‘ Bad as the best may be ; it is better to be poisoned in your blood than in your principles.’ ”

Eola reassured her. “ It is quite all right, I am going to marry him, and you are going to take care of the doctor for me.”

“ Then I don’t understand what you mean, miss, about not marrying a missionary,” said Mrs. Hulver, completely puzzled.

“ Mr. Alderbury is giving up missionary work. He has been offered a bishopric.”

“ And him with those legs ! ”

“ The legs don’t matter if they belong to the right sort of man, as is the case here,” said Eola, prepared to do battle for her lover.

“ Mr. Alderbury, my Lord Bishop ! I can’t get over it ; it is so surprising ! ”

“ You haven’t congratulated me and wished me good luck,” Eola remarked in an aggrieved voice, which she knew would win over her faithful house-keeper.

“ I’m sure I beg your pardon. I congratulate you with all my heart. Fancy you marrying a bishop ! Who would have thought it ! It’s no more than you deserve all the same. Dear me ! How strangely things turn out ! you taking a missionary and finding yourself marrying a bishop ! and Mr. Ananda coming to life again and finding his wife a widow ! and she escaping all through losing her husband and being widowed !

As William—that was my third—said when he fell into a prickly pear bush and just escaped being seen the worse for liquor by the colonel: ‘Maria, me dear,’—he was such a gentleman in his speech, he was!—‘Maria, me dear! You never know your luck.’ ”

THE END.





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Telephone No.
3524 Central

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